

For the Best Things

JR. Miller D.D.



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For the Best Things

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TRANSFIGURED LIFE
UNTO THE HILLS
YOUNG MEN; FAULTS AND IDEALS

Thomas H. Crowell & Company
New York

For the Best Things

BY

J. R. MILLER

AUTHOR OF

"SILENT TIMES," "MAKING THE MOST OF LIFE,"
"UPPER CURRENTS," ETC.

*What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me.*

—BROWNING.

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HE *who is satisfied with himself and with his attainments is not living worthily. A wholesome life ever sees better things yet to be reached. It is true, as Browning says,*

*When the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something.*

Being good is not enough; striving to be better is not the loftiest aim. Nothing less than the best should ever satisfy an immortal being.

J. R. M.

Philadelphia, U. S. A.



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For the Best Things

*"I may not reach the heights I seek,
My untried strength may fail me;
Or, halfway up the mountain peak,
Fierce tempests may assail me.
But though that place I never gain,
Herein lies life's comfort for my pain—
I will be worthy of it.*

*"I may not triumph in success,
Despite my earnest labor.
I may not grasp results that bless
The efforts of my neighbor.
But though that goal I never see,
This thought shall always dwell with me—
I will be worthy of it."*

CHAPTER ONE

For the Best Things



WE should seek only the best things in life. If everyone did, this would be an ideal world. The trouble is, however, that many knowing the good, yet choose the evil. What shall we call the drift in human nature that causes it to gravitate so often and so easily toward lower rather than rise upward toward higher things? We need not trouble about the philosophy of it, but it is worth while for us to find some way of overcoming the unhappy tendency. There is a way. It may not be easy—the easy course is just to let ourselves drift—but we know too well what the end of this will be. We should be brave enough to take ourselves vigorously in hand and to get our faces turned toward the best things. Nothing will drift upstream; we shall have to use the oars if we

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want our boat to go that way. But that is the way to the best things.

What are the things that are worthiest and best? We do not need to say condemning words about the things of this world. It is our Father's world. It is full of beauty. The Creator saw when it was finished that it was all very good. We are to accept our place in life contentedly and cheerfully, whatever the limitations, whatever the hardness, and set about living in such a way that we shall make one little spot of the world as much as possible like heaven.

We have only to turn to the Scriptures if we would learn what are the best things. Nothing can be worth while which will ever perish. We are immortal and only immortal things will meet our deepest needs. Nothing is best which we cannot carry with us when we go away from earth. We cannot carry money, or jewels, or estates, into the other world, hence these are not the best things.

Jesus Christ is accepted as a divine Teacher—a Teacher come from God. Let us ask him,

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“What are the best things?” and we find answers to our question on every page of the Gospels. In his Sermon on the Mount he says, “Seek ye first the kingdom of your Father and his righteousness.” He had been exhorting his disciples against anxiety. He assured them that their Father who cares for the birds; and clothes the flowers would much more surely care for them. They need never have any anxiety, therefore, nor give themselves a moment’s care about their physical needs. Instead of this, they should seek first and only the Father’s kingdom, and all else that they should need would be supplied to them.

The things of God’s kingdom, therefore, are the best things. We learn what some of these things are from the Beatitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” that is, the lowly, the humble. Those who think highly of themselves are not the highest in God’s sight, but those who forget themselves and hold all their gifts and powers at the bidding of the Master for any service to which he may send them.

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Jesus spoke only once of his own heart, and then he said he was meek and lowly in heart. His whole life was one of lowliness. His hands had made the worlds, but he used them without reserve in serving earth's needy ones.

“Blessed are the meek.” The meek are the long-suffering, those who endure wrong patiently, uncomplainingly, returning love for hate, kindness for unkindness, prayers for curses. Men do not usually think of meekness as one of the best things, but Jesus writes it high in the list, and says that the meek shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.” It is not attainment only that heaven approves, but the longing to attain. Saintliness is beautiful, but it takes a long while to reach it. No doubt one of the best things is to be perfect, to wear the image of Christ, but the lofty reach seems almost impossible. This is the goal, but it shines far off, and it seems to us that we cannot come up to it till we gain heaven. It is a comfort

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to us to know that one of the best things is longing for the best, hunger for righteousness.

“Blessed are the merciful.” Men do not praise the merciful. They commend what they call the heroic qualities. The strong, the brilliant, the clever, those who succeed even by trampling the meek under their feet, win the honors in this world. But the Master writes among those whom heaven calls blessed the merciful, those who are pitiful toward weakness, compassionate toward the erring, patient with the dull and slow, and almoners of the divine mercy toward all.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.” Is there in all the range of the things one may live for anything that will mean more in the making of happiness than, amid all life’s experiences of temptation, to keep one’s heart pure? This is a secret of peace which insures joy and gladness, whatever the experiences may be. It transfigures the life, making it shine as with an inner light. It gives one influence over others, making one a benediction every-

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where. A pure heart is one of the best things.

“Blessed are the peacemakers.” The highest of all the commendations in the Beatitudes is given to these—“they shall be called the sons of God.” Unquestionably one of the best things in all the range of life is to be a peacemaker, to exert a loving influence over others, to help to bring together those who are in danger of falling apart, to deepen and strengthen friendships. There are enough people in the world who live to kindle strifes, to widen breaches and estrangements, to make men hate each other, to encourage quarreling and bitter feelings. No mission is diviner than to be a maker of peace between man and man.

These are suggestions only of some of the best things. Jesus indicates others in his teachings. His disciples contended more than once on the question of greatness. It is a proper desire to wish to be a worthy follower of Christ. A good man used to pray, “Lord, make me an uncommon Christian.” Christ

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will never blame us for wanting to follow him with uncommon faithfulness and to live a life of unusual earnestness and godliness. But the disciples were thinking of rank, of priority in position. Jesus told them that the first places in his kingdom must be won—not by valor on the battlefield, not by favoritism, but by love. Those who serve others the most humbly, the most unselfishly, the most helpfully, are the best and most Christlike Christians.

On another occasion, the same lesson was taught by an act. Jesus quietly rose, laid aside his garments, girded him for the work of an actual servant, and then began to wash his disciples' feet. The Master showed them that such serving was not degrading, but honorable. Jesus never did anything diviner in all his ministry than what he did that night. And no better opportunity of doing truly great and noble things will ever come to us than when it is our privilege to perform some lowly duties of love in serving or helping Christ's little ones. The lowlier the

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person is who needs the help, and the lowlier the deed it may be ours to do, the diviner the service.

*“They are little, simple things to do,—
To sweep a room, to bake a loaf of bread,
Kiss a hurt finger, tie a baby’s shoe,
To mend a crying school-boy’s broken sled.*

*“Such little, simple things! but they above
Who on our little world attendant wait,
And joyful wait, note only if through love
The deed be done to count the work as great.”*

These are only hints of the best things in life. The world thinks that those who turn away from the quest for earth’s prizes to live lowly lives of love, trying to help the poor, the weak, the obscure, are throwing away their opportunities. It thinks they are following a delusion, and pities them. But those are rather to be pitied who think they are finding the best things in their quest for wealth, for honor, for fame, for power. There will come a day of revealing, when

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things shall be seen as they are, and then it will appear that those who have devoted their lives to the honor of Christ, and to the lowly service of love in Christ's name are the really shining ones, that they are doing the best, worthiest and most beautiful things under the sun, and will receive the highest honors and rewards.

If we learn this lesson well the aspect of all life will be changed for us. We shall see that there are things that are gloriously worth while, in which the world beholds no beauty, no honor. The greatest thing is love. To live the little Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians day after day, in quiet circumstances, among people who need to be loved and helped onward, is a greater achievement for a lifetime than to win one's way to fame or to wealth by selfish striving. One writes thus of a "perfect day":

*"I have done good work; I have seen a friend
Who cheered me with a cordial look;
And I found a sweet half hour to spend
With a child, and a rare good book.*

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*“What more could I ask than this, I say?—
A book—a child—a friend,
And my honest work! ’Twas a perfect day,
From dawn till the starlight end.”*

We should live always for the best things. Some people live for good things, but not the best, and the good is often the enemy of the best, inasmuch as it satisfies us and makes us contented to live on the lower planes. There is nothing dishonorable in having small capacities and in living and working in commonplace positions, if one is doing his best. The lowliest who does God’s will faithfully is as honorable in God’s sight as the man who, with larger abilities and larger opportunities, does greater things. But when one with great gifts does only trivial things, he is not living worthily.

In our Lord’s parable, the merchant sought always for the best. He dealt in pearls, one of the finest commodities of the times. He dealt only in goodly pearls, however, not in those of an inferior quality. One day he heard of a new pearl which had just been found

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which was of exceptional beauty and brilliance. It was of great value, so great that the only way he could obtain it was to sell all his other pearls. This he did, and purchased the one peerless pearl.

This man illustrates those who are content with nothing less than the best things. The good does not satisfy them if there is a better; the better is quickly given up to get the best. This must be the rule of life for all who would live worthily. Especially should it be the rule for all who are following Christ. The good should never content them if there is a better possible. They should be ready to pay any price to attain the best.

In Christian life, only the highest ideal should be accepted. It is not enough to say, "Some of self and some of thee," or even "Less of self and more of thee"; the only true striving must be for "None of self, and all of thee." A young Christian has just asked whether dancing, card-playing and the theatre are permissible for a Christian. The question may be answered by asking another:

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“ Do you want to reach the highest and best in Christian life and service, or do you desire to attain only the lowest levels which the widest charity will accept as within the lines of permissible things? Do you want to rise to the absolutely best things in Christian consecration? or do you wish to make just as little as possible of your devotion to Christ? ”

In all lines of life many pleasant things have to be given up in order to reach the best. There is a story of a boy who aspired to be some day a skillful surgeon. He was an enthusiastic baseball player. An eminent surgeon who knew the boy's desire told him that his playing would stiffen and thicken his fingers and finally destroy the delicacy of touch that is so essential in critical surgical work. The favorite amusement was instantly sacrificed—the good given up for the better, the best.

The same rule must be followed in every department of life. We can get the best things only by the sacrifice of the things that are merely good.

“ Think on These Things ”

*I find earth not gray but rosy,
Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
Do I stand and stare? All's blue.*

—ROBERT BROWNING.

*“Let us believe the best; there are enough, you know,
Judging by what they see—wronging each other so.
Let us believe the best; there are enough to blame,
Numbers to think the worst—numbers to brand a name.*

*“Many a man would rise out of his dark despair,
If there were only one just to believe and care—
Out of the losing side daring to take his stand—
Hedless of what men say, holding a brother's hand.”*

CHAPTER TWO

“Think on These Things”



HERE are certain single phases of life that are far-reaching in their influence. The habit of cheerfulness, for instance, is said to be worth to a man many thousands a year. The habit of being always an encourager, never a discourager, gives incalculable value to one's personality and influence. A discourager is a misanthrope. He makes life harder for every other life he touches; and an encourager is a constant inspiration to others, and makes life easier for every one.

There is another habit of life, which if it were to become universal would change many things—namely, the habit of always seeing the good in people, in conditions, in circumstances, and in experiences. St. Paul suggests it when he says in a remarkable passage,

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“If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” The emphasis seems to be on any—if there be any virtue, even the least, in another, if there be in a life which seems almost wholly bad, even the smallest thing that is good, we are to find that and to think upon that mere speck of beauty, rather than on the much that is evil and unbeautiful. If there be in a person any praise, any smallest quality or act that is worthy of praise, of which we can speak with even the faintest approval and commendation, we should give thought to that, and voice our appreciation, rather than think and speak of the many things in the person that are not good or praiseworthy.

It is easy to think of reasons why this is the Christian way. It is Christ's way with us. If there be any good, even the faintest spark of virtue or hope in a life, Christ sees it. He is looking for good and hopeful things. Some people see only the faults and flaws in the lives of others—they are looking for these things—blemishes, defects, imperfections.

“Think on These Things”

They are never trying to find anything beautiful and they find what they seek. Our Master, however, is looking for things that are right, good beginnings of better things. Some one asked the curator of an academy of fine arts regarding the pictures of a certain artist: “What do you consider the defects in his work?” The answer was, “We do not look for defects here, but for excellences.” It is thus that our Master does in our lives—he does not look for the imperfections, of which there always are many, but for things that are worthy of commendation. If there be any virtue he finds it, takes note of it, nourishes it, woos it out. If Christ looked upon us as we too often look upon others, seeing the flaws, the shortcomings, the inconsistencies, the failures, and judged us by these, not many of us ever would grow into beauty. But where there is even a spark of good he finds it and cultivates it into its best possibilities.

We shall never become of much use in the world until we learn this lesson of always

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finding and encouraging the best. We shall never lift up any one to a higher, better life until we have found in him something to approve and commend. There are some men and women who wish to help others, to be of use to them, but work after a wrong method. They think they must eliminate the faults and defects which they find, and so they watch for things they cannot approve. They have keen eyes for specks—none are too small for them to see—but they never see the beautiful things in another. The Master refers to such persons in his teaching about motes and beams. He would have us look for the good, not the evil, in others.

There is no life so devoid of beauty and good that it has in it nothing worthy of commendation. Ruskin found even in the mud of London streets the elements out of which gems are formed—the opal, the sapphire, the diamond. The love of Christ finds even in the moral refuse of this world possibilities of loveliness in character and heavenliness in life. We cannot do anything to help men by

“Think on These Things”

indulging in criticism and denunciation. We can call out the good in others only as the sun woos out the plants and flowers from the cold earth in the springtime—by its warmth. If the friends of Christ would cease their fault-finding and become true friends of men, finding the smallest beginnings of virtue and encouraging them, the earth would soon be changed into a garden.

We are continually meeting those who are discouraged, who have fallen under the shadow of misfortune, who have done wrong, perhaps, and are suffering in reputation, or who have been unjustly treated and are enduring the sting. These are the persons to whom our love should go out in words of hope and cheer, instead of blame. James Whitcomb Riley teaches the lesson in his well-known lines : *

*When over the fair fame of friend or foe
The shadow of disgrace shall fall, instead*

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*Of words of blame or proof of thus and so,
Let something good be said.*

*Forget not that no fellow-being yet
May fall so low but love may lift his head;
Even the cheek of shame with tears is wet
If something good be said.*

*No generous heart may vainly turn aside
In ways of sympathy; no soul so dead
But may awaken strong and glorified,
If something good be said.*

*And so I charge ye, by the thorny crown,
And by the cross on which the Saviour bled,
And by your own soul's hope of fair renown,
Let something good be said.*

One of the most significant words of personal experience in the Old Testament is that in which David tells us, at the close of his wonderful life, that all he had attained and achieved he owed to God's gentleness. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." If God had been harsh with him—stern, critical, severely exacting, David never would have

“Think on These Things”

reached the noble life, with its wonderful achievements, which he finally attained. If God had been severe with him after his falls and failures, David never would have risen to power and distinction. God's gentleness made him great. We can help others to become great only by being patient with them. Men and women everywhere need nothing so much as gentleness.

*“So many gods, so many creeds,
So many paths that wind and wind,
When just the art of being kind
Is all this sad world needs.”*

Are not many of us too brusque with each other? Do we not lack in kindness, in patience, in tenderness? Some men would have us believe that gentleness is an unmanly quality. But it is not—rudeness and harshness are always unmanly; gentleness is divine. For many people, life is not easy, and we make it very much harder for them to live worthily when we deal harshly with them, when we are exacting, when we chide or blame them,

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or when we exercise our wits in saying smart, cutting and irritating things to annoy and vex them. It was said of William Cullen Bryant that he treated every neighbor as if he were an angel in disguise. That is, he had a feeling akin to reverence for every one who entered his presence. We do not know to whom we are speaking when we meet a stranger any of these common days. Let us treat him as the poet did his neighbor—as if he were an angel.

Cardinal Newman defines a gentleman as one who never needlessly causes pain to another. If we are followers of Christ, we have no right to be ungentle, to be ill-mannered, to act disagreeably, to treat any other one rudely, brusquely. "If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." We should never forget the teaching of our Master, that the hungry person we feed in his name, the sick person we visit, the stranger to whom we show kindness, the discouraged person we encourage, the fainting one we lift up and start on his way again, is the

“Think on These Things”

Master himself. “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.” How would we treat Jesus if we found him in any condition of need? That is to be the test in our dealings with men. We dare not be ungentle to any one—it may be an angel unaware; it may be Christ himself.

The teaching applies to our own personal experience of sorrow. We should seek the line of brightness in any dark picture, and think of that. And there always are breaks in the clouds through which we can see the blue and the stars. No lot in life is ever so utterly hopeless as to have in it nothing to alleviate its unhappiness. There is always something of brightness, one line, at least, in the darkest experience.

*“You scarce can wander in a wood so dense at
night,
But if the heavens be clear,
Some trembling star, rejoicing in its grateful
light,
Gleams through the atmosphere.*

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*“ You scarce can tread a track so sadly dark in
life,
But if your heart be right,
Some kindly hope, benignly beaming o'er your
strife,
Illuminates the night.”*

There always are comforts, no matter how great the sorrow. Every cloud has on it some bit of silver lining. There are hopes, consolations, encouragements, in every experience of grief or loss, and we are to think of these and not alone of the sad elements in the experience. One chill day a beam of sunshine, coming into the parlor through the shutters, made a bright spot on the carpet. The little dog that had been lying in a dark corner of the room got up at once and went and lay down in the patch of sunshine. That is what we should do in our larger life. When, into any darkness or gloom of ours, even the faintest ray of light streams, we should accept it, and sit down in its brightness. There is reason for gratitude in the most bitter experience—we should find that and enjoy its

“Think on These Things”

brightness. We should turn our eyes from the clouds and look at the stars.

*“Live in the sunshine—God meant it for you;
Live as the robins, and sing the day through.”*

Think on the good, not the evil. Think on the loveliness, not on the disfigurements. Think on the pure, not on the soiled. Think on the hopeful things in men, their possibilities of nobleness, not on their faults. In sorrow, find the Face of Christ, and gaze on that till you forget your grief. In all life, if there be any virtue, any praise, any beauty, any joy, think on these things, and it will lift up your life into strength, nobleness, divineness.

Apelles, the Approved

*“O Sentinel at the loose-swung door of my impetuous lips,
Guard close to-day! Make sure no word unjust or
cruel slips
In anger forth, by folly spurred or armed with envy’s
whips;
Keep clear the way to-day.*

*“And Warden of my soul’s stained house, where love
and hate are born,
O make it clean, if swept must be with pain’s rough
broom of thorn!
And quiet impose, so straining ears with world-din
racked and torn,
May catch what God doth say.”*

*“You must live each day at your very best:
The work of the world is done by few;
God asks that a part be done by you.”*

CHAPTER THREE

Apelles, the Approved



T. Paul speaks of one of his friends as “Apelles, the approved.” We do not know who Apelles was. He is not named elsewhere in the New Testament nor does he have any place in secular history. Yet the distinction which St. Paul gives him is suggestive. He had been put to the test in some way and had not failed. So he had won the title, “Apelles, the approved.” Every Christian should want to have the approval of men. There are instances, no doubt, in which good men have to brave the opposition of others and go against their opinions. Yet a Christian should seek to make his life so beautiful, so consistent, so worthy, so like his Master’s, that everywhere he shall be well spoken of. The religion of Christ is beautiful. One of the few things said about the

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youth and early manhood of Jesus is, that he “advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” It is not said only that he advanced in favor with God—that would not seem strange to us, since he was the Son of God—but that he advanced also in favor with men. As he grew older his life became more winning and attractive, his disposition sweeter, nobler, manlier. There was nothing austere in him, nothing disagreeable, nothing that made his neighbors dislike him.

Some persons have the impression that religion is not winsome, that it makes one somehow uncongenial and less agreeable. But the very reverse of this is true. The nearer we approach to the perfection of Christ, the more will people love us and approve of our life. When the religion of any one makes him disliked, there is something wrong, not with the religion, but with the person’s interpretation of it. If we would win for ourselves the honorable designation, “The approved,” we must see to it that we make our life spot-

Apelles, the Approved

less in its beauty and our conduct true to the teachings of our Master.

We are tested in many ways. We are tested by temptations. Every one must be tempted. Untested strength is not trustworthy. An old chronicle tells of a company of men going into battle with swords which bent double at the first assault. They had not been tried and the steel was untempered. Before men can be entrusted with sacred interests and responsibilities they must be tried. Not till we have been proved are we ready for service.

We are tested by our duties. We do not begin to realize how much depends upon our faithfulness in the common days. To fail in our testing is to come unready to great crises. We say God does his own work in the world. Yes, but not without us. Our faithfulness is essential to the carrying out of the divine purposes. There is a story of a blacksmith who was busy in his shop near the French and German border one snowy night just before Christmas. He was very weary, for he had

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toiled all the day long. He was standing by his forge, looking wistfully toward his humble cottage where the lights were shining, and where his children were awaiting his homecoming. He was at his last piece of work—a rivet which it required much care to shape properly. This rivet was to hold together the metal work of a bridge that was to span the river near his forge. The rivet was the key to the whole bridge. The blacksmith in his weariness was sorely tempted to hurry, and to skimp his work. It was only a little rivet, and was so troublesome to make—why should he stay to do it carefully? But his good angel bade him do his best. So he put away the temptation and rested not until his work was perfectly done.

Some years later war broke out. A squadron of the blacksmith's countrymen were driven over the bridge in headlong flight. The bridge trembled under the weight. All depended on the little rivet—was it secure enough to stand the strain? Only the blacksmith's work that night stood between the men and de-

Apelles, the Approved

struction. The rivet stood the test — the blacksmith and his work were approved.

We do not know what important interests may depend some critical hour, years from now, on the piece of work we are doing to-day, on the honesty and truth we shall build into our character to-morrow. Let us do all we do so well that the Master and the world shall speak of us as the approved.

The lesson applies also to the cultivation of our Christian life and character. Perhaps we do not pay enough heed to this matter. We confess Christ and take our place among his people, and think nothing more is required of us. But that is only the beginning. Ten or twelve years ago a man gave himself to Christ. He was sincere from the first, but was only a diamond in the rough. He had been brought up in unrefined associations and companionships. He had been a profane man, a man of quick temper, resentful, of loud and uncouth speech, lacking all gentleness and tenderness. But this man took Christ into his heart and life, with most loving welcome, and

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he has been marvelously transformed by the divine indwelling. His whole nature has been changed. His manners have been softened into real gracefulness. His temper has been sweetened. The very tones of his speech have become quiet and kindly, almost musical. He has had but little time in his busy days and nights for reading and study, and yet he seems now like a man who has received a liberal education since his conversion.

This example illustrates the value of spiritual culture in a Christian. The word "grace" means beauty of form, manner and movement, something pleasing, agreeable, winsome. To grow in grace is to grow in spiritual beauty. The finer things in Christian character should be cultivated. Some one chided a great artist with giving too much time to trifles in the finishing of his statues. He would spend hours and hours on a small feature. He replied, "Little things make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." We cannot spend too much time or thought on the culture of what may seem the smaller elements of Christian

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character. In the fourth century B.C. there was a great artist named also Apelles. His motto is said to have been, *Nulla dies sine linea*, "No day without a line." Every day he must make at least a little progress in his art, become a little better painter, do a little more beautiful work. Is not this a good motto for us who are Christians? We never should be content with anything less than perfection, and in striving to reach perfection we should add a line every day. We should never allow a day to pass in which we do not become a somewhat more beautiful Christian.

For example, in the matter of temper. Perhaps there is nothing that mars the beauty of more Christian lives than ill temper in some of its manifold forms. There is no confession made oftener than this—"Somehow I cannot control my temper." Many good people seem to think that faults of temper are not really sins, certainly not grievous sins—that they are only little infirmities, not needing even to be repented of. Then the fact that nearly everybody has the same fault

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seems to make it less a fault, scarcely more than a common human trait. But let us not allow ourselves to be deceived into any such minimizing of faulty temper. Think how much pain and bitterness are caused every day to gentle hearts by bad tempers. Then think how outbreaks of temper in others appear to you—how unlovely, how unseemly, how undivine. That is just the way similar outbreaks in you appear to others. If we would be approved, we must get this vice of ill temper in us transformed into gentle, patient lovingness.

Thought for others is another of the details in which Christians should cultivate their characters. It is only when self dies and we learn to put others in the empty place, that we begin truly to live the Christian life. We cannot understand to what refinements of love the religion of Christ calls us. We are not always kind to each other, not always patient with each other, not always courteous, not always forgiving, not always large-hearted and gentle. Sometimes we are fretful, irrita-

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ble, sensitive, too easily hurt. We speak words which are like thorns. We doubt and suspect each other. We are too likely to take up an evil report against another. If we would be among the approved, we must let the sweetness of love for others in our lives. We admire love in others. It warms our hearts to find the whole thirteenth of First Corinthians in some life. That is the ideal for us. It vexes us to find others selfish, suspicious, unforgiving, thoughtless, unkind. It vexes others just as much to find the same unloving things in us.

*“Search thine own heart. What painest thee
In others, in thyself may be.”*

Again, if we would win the honor of being approved by men we must trust God. If the religion of Christ stands for anything in the lives of those who follow him it stands for faith and confidence. We are to be anxious for nothing. The meaning of this is that we need never doubt nor be afraid. But what is the fact? Are Christians any more trustful

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in the presence of danger and want, than other people, not Christians, are? Are followers of Christ any more confident and joyful in time of trouble and loss than other people are? Joy is a Christian duty. We are to rejoice always. How is it with most Christians? What comes of the joy when we suffer pain or when we experience loss?

There is a story of song birds being brought over the sea. There were thirty-six thousand of them, mostly canaries. At first, after the ship sailed, the sea was calm and the birds were silent. They kept their little heads under their wings and not a note was heard. But the third day out the ship struck a furious gale. The emigrants were terrified, the children wailed. Then this strange thing happened. As the tempest reached its height, the birds all began to sing, first one, then another, till the whole thirty-six thousand were singing as if their little throats would burst. Is that the way we Christians do? When the trouble begins, when the clouds of sorrow gather and break, when the storm rises in its

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fury—do we then begin to sing? If we fully understood the covenant of our God and believed his promises, should not our song break forth in tenfold joy when the tempest begins? But instead, we get frightened at the smallest troubles, we fret and grow discontented when any hope fails. We chafē at little sufferings, we complain and repine, and the sunshine dies out of our face and the gladness out of our voice.

No doubt one reason Apelles was called the approved was because he trusted God absolutely. Whatever word he found among the promises he received it as one of God's words, none of which ever has failed, or ever can fail. If we can convince the people of the world that we have tried and proved the divine words, thousands will want our God, too. People who know us will not doubt our sincerity, nor will they doubt the faithfulness and the power of our Christ. When we begin to live thus, believing, trusting, rejoicing, then people will receive our gospel and we shall become approved.

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Are we living so as to commend Christ and his gospel to all who know us and see us, week days as well as Sundays? We are always in the eye of the world. A moment's ill temper, a bit of selfish living, an angry word, a careless act, an unseemly display of pride, of greed, of passion, of resentment, sharpness in driving a bargain, a little impatience, a neglect of duty, the want of obligingness toward others, unlovingness shown even toward the lowliest—there is nothing so trivial that in it we may not either honor or dishonor our Master.

The Rule of Peace

*With eager heart and will on fire
I fought to win my great desire;
"Peace shall be mine," I said, but life
Grew bitter in the endless strife.*

*My soul was weary, and my pride
Was wounded deep; to heaven I cried,
"God grant me peace or I must die";
The dumb stars glittered no reply.*

*Broken at last, I bowed my head,
Forgetting all myself, and said,
"Whatever comes, His will be done,"
And in that moment peace was won.*

—HENRY VAN DYKE.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Rule of Peace



PEACE is one of the most suggestive words in the Bible. It appears in very ancient promises as the richest and ripest fruit of trust in God. It is found in

the angel's announcement of the birth of the Saviour as one of the blessings of his coming. It is the bequest of the Master to his disciples at his leaving them. It runs through the Epistles as the greatest of the blessings of redemption, peace with God, the peace of God.

St. Paul exhorts us to let peace rule in our hearts. A marginal reading suggests another rendering—"Let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts." It is to sit on the throne and have undisputed sway in our life. When, in the circumstances of any day, things arise which naturally would trouble us, break

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into the calm and composure of our hearts, peace is to sit as arbiter, settling all conflicts of feeling and bringing all strifes and differences to quiet adjustment.

We are exhorted to let this peace rule. So we can hinder its ruling if we will. It cannot rule unless we let it. We have the same truth everywhere in the Bible—nothing can enter our heart and have sway there, unless we let it. Christ stands at the door; he wants to enter to bless us, but we have to let him in. He will never lift the latch of the door with his own hand. "If any man open the door, I will come in." So it is with peace. It seeks to enter our hearts, it wants to rule there, but it will not force its way in. We must let it rule.

Sometimes people are discouraged when they find how high is the ideal of Christian life in this matter of peace. We must remember, however, that while the ideal is high, the attainment is always progressive. No one begins with the accomplished ideal. Peace is a lesson which has to be learned, and learned slowly. In our Lord's wonderful promise he

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says he will give rest to all who come to him—rest as an immediate gift. Then he says, farther on, that if we will take his yoke upon us and learn of him, we shall find rest. The full and complete rest has to be learned. We must enter Christ's school. We must accept his training and discipline. The same is true of Christ's peace. When we begin, we find it impossible to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts fully and continually. We go stumbling on our way, making many mistakes. It takes years to reach the complete standard. But there should be growth every day. Ruskin, in speaking of Christian growth, has this suggestive sentence, "He only is advancing in life whose heart is growing softer, whose blood warmer, whose brain quicker, and whose spirit is entering into loving peace." The growing spirit is one that is entering more and more fully into peace.

The whole matter of spiritual culture seems to be included in this thought. Every day should see us advancing, learning more of Christ, and growing more and more into the

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beauty of Christ. The other day it was said of a Christian man, who has been active in many forms of usefulness and whose life has been full of good deeds, that he is growing irritable, that he is getting easily vexed and fretted, that he is losing his sweetness of temper and is becoming easily provoked. This may be the result of ill health. We dare not judge another man when we see, or think we see, such faults manifesting themselves in his disposition. There may be a physical reason for this apparent deterioration in spiritual life. There are certain conditions of health which make it very hard for a man to keep sweet. When we see a good man or a good woman sensitive, touchy, easily hurt, hard to get along with, we must beware that we do not think or speak uncharitably of them. There may be a reason—ill health, business trouble, disappointment, a hidden sorrow. God understands, and we must not judge or condemn.

Nevertheless we should mark well the lesson that one phase of Christian growth should

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oe this—the spirit entering into more and more loving peace. If the peace of Christ is ruling at all in our hearts it should rule a little more fully to-day than it did yesterday and to-morrow than it does to-day. We should be growing continually in all that belongs to peace. Worry is not only a sin—it is also one of the most disfiguring of the vices. It mars and spoils the beauty of a life. Discouragement is a sin, and discouragement hurts a life immeasurably. If we have the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts we will be getting farther and farther away from worry every day. Peace sweetens the life, sweetens the disposition. It puts a stop to discontent, to complaining; it makes a man patient with others, gentle to all, humble and lowly in his thought of himself. Then what does worrying ever accomplish? Does it make the way sweeter, the burden lighter?

*“I’ve learned as days have passed me,
Fretting never lifts the load;
And that worry, much or little,
Never smooths an irksome road;*

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*For you know that somehow, always,
Doors are opened, ways are made;
When we work and live in patience
Under all the cross that's laid.*

*“He who waters meadow lilies
With the dew from out the sky;
He who feeds the flitting sparrows,
When in need for food they cry,
Never fails to help his children
In all things, both great and small;
For his ear is ever open
To our faintest far-off call.”*

A recent writer, speaking of the habit of worry and of the evil that comes from it, asks, in order to test the spirit of Christian lives: “What is the effect of your presence in your home? Does your look fall like a sunbeam or like a shadow across the breakfast table? Does your conversation lie like a strip of summer sky, or a patch of midnight across the family life? Upon what subjects do you speak with largest freedom and keenest relish—your aches and failures, or the things which are beautiful, fine and high? For your

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own sake and for the sake of others, you ought to bring your soul into a jubilant mood. All Christian virtues grow best under a sky filled with sun, and the man who persists in being gloomy, sour and moody, will have his home filled at last with weeds, brambles and briars."

So we see that the lesson of peace is not a mystical and unpractical one, but one that is most practical. Our hearts make our lives. If we are not learning this lesson, if peace is not ruling more and more in our hearts, our lives are becoming less and less beautiful. We do not ourselves like people who are sour, misanthropic and censorious, who are dictatorial, tyrannical, who are not disposed to be kindly, obliging and agreeable. And what is not beautiful to our eyes in others is not likely to be lovely to the eyes of others in us. Our religion must be winsome, else it is not the religion that Christ teaches us. "Whatsoever things are lovely," is one of the features which we find in St. Paul's wonderful picture of true Christian character.

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We need to look well, therefore, to the matter of the growth of loving peace in our life. Wherever it rules in the heart it produces beauty in the disposition. It makes the whole life more and more loving. In horticulture they tell us that thorns are only leaves which through heat or lack of water, or some other unfavorable conditions, have failed to grow. The thorns which we dislike so would have been beautiful leaves but for the hindering conditions under which they grew. It is, no doubt, true of the things in us which are disagreeable—and we all have them—that they are perverted or arrested growths. God meant them to be lovely qualities in us, marks of beauty, adornments to make our lives more Christlike. But in some way they have been stunted, dwarfed, perverted, and in actual life are thorns instead of shining leaves. Instead of being benedictions to other lives, these marred growths in us hurt them. Instead of being leaves to give shade to those who seek shelter from the heat, they are thorns which pierce, give pain and wound.

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We need to look well to the culture of our lives that in every feature they may be beautiful, and that we may be blessings to others in the largest measure. And in no way can we attain such spiritual culture so surely, so richly, as by letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. Peace is the composite of all the graces. Love, joy, gentleness, thoughtfulness, humility, kindness, patience—all are blended in peace. The absence of peace in a heart produces a life without beauty. Peace ruling in the heart gives a life that is full of all lovely things.

Christ wants us to be beautiful. There is a little prayer in the Ninetieth Psalm which means a great deal—"Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." God himself is beautiful. All moral excellences are in him—truth, justice, purity, patience, gentleness, long-suffering, love; and the ideal Christian life is one in which all these features and qualities are found. A Christian ought to be gentle like his Master, full of helpfulness, good-tempered, slow to anger, enduring

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wrong without resentment, returning good for evil, refined and courteous, sincere in his friendships, in honor preferring others, humble, not seeking his own advancement. As Christian people, we should seek to be like our Master in all things; we should be above reproach, without blame in all matters, even in what may be called the minor moralities. Our dispositions should be sweet and our conduct in all things so beautiful that all who know us, or do business with us, or are associated with us in any capacity, will testify to our Christlikeness and will receive from their contacts with us touches of blessing and of beauty. The way to have such a character, such a disposition, is to let the peace of Christ have sway in our hearts.

The trouble with us is that we do not let this peace rule in us. Instead, we let a thousand other things—cares, disappointments, discontents, anxieties, fears, doubts, rule and mutiny against the rightful heart-ruler. No wonder we have so little of the reign of quietness and calmness in us. If we would let peace

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take its place on the throne and control all our life, it would soon grow into beauty. Then joy would sing its sweet songs wherever we go.

We do not begin to realize the blessings that a heart truly controlled by the peace of God will bring into our life. We do not know the possibilities of loveliness of character there are in us, if only we would let peace dominate everything. We do not dream of the good we might do in the world, the comfort we might be to others and the cheer and inspiration we might give to discouraged ones, those who are hard beset and those who are in sorrow, if we would let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts. We do not know how many souls we might win for Christ, how many lives we might redeem from low things and evil ways, if only the peace of Christ truly dwelt in us, transforming us into the beauty of the Lord. Nothing so wins others to better things as the influence of a sweet, disciplined and radiant personality.

Must we go on forever in the unsatisfactory

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way in which many of us have been living? Must we still allow our peace to be broken by every passing cloud, every fear, every shadow? Shall we not set the peace of Christ on the throne, allowing it to arbitrate all our affairs, and to give its beauty to our disposition? We cannot understand the reason why this or that suffering, sorrow or disappointment comes into our life. But we do not have to understand. God is wiser than we and we may leave the whole matter in his hand. That will give us peace.

*“Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.”*

Sympathy with Weakness

Art thou weary, tender heart?

Be glad of pain;

In sorrow, sweetest things will grow,

All flowers in rain.

God watches, and thou wilt have sun

When clouds their perfect work have done.

—RICHARD WATSON GILDER.

“Why do we worry about the years

That our feet have not yet trod?

Who labors with courage and trust, nor fears,

Has fellowship with God.

“The best will come in the great ‘To be,’

It is ours to serve and wait;

And the wonderful future we soon shall see,

For death is but the gate.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Sympathy with Weakness



NO truth means more to us in the way of encouragement and strength than the assurance of Christ's sympathy. To sympathize is to feel with. The Scriptures tell us that in heaven Jesus Christ is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. He feels what we are feeling. If we are suffering, the thing which troubles us touches him. If we are wronged, the wrong pains him. But Christ is touched also with a feeling of our infirmities. Infirmities are weaknesses. We may have no particular sorrow or pain, and yet we may have infirmities. A man may not be sick, and yet he may be infirm, lacking strength. Some men have no sympathy with weakness. They show it no consideration. They have no patience with those who stumble. They make no allowance for those who do their work im-

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perfectly. But Jesus has infinite sympathy with weakness. One of the qualifications for the priestly office in the ancient times was ability to sympathize with the people in their experiences—"who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring." This quality was in Christ. He was most patient with weakness, most gentle toward all human infirmity. His disciples were always making mistakes, but he never was impatient with them; he bore with all their infirmities.

There is special reference to temptation when sympathy with weakness is mentioned. Christ is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, for he was tempted in all points like as we are. He knows all about temptation. When we are in the midst of the struggle and when it seems to us we cannot hold out, he sympathizes with us, and is most gentle toward us. If we are in danger of falling, he helps us to overcome.

An English naval officer told a grateful story of the way he was helped and saved from dishonor in his first experience in battle. He was

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a midshipman, fourteen years old. The volleys of the enemy's musketry so terrified him that he almost fainted. The officer over him saw his state and came close beside him, keeping his own face toward the enemy, and held the midshipman's hand, saying in a calm, quiet, affectionate way, "Courage, my boy! You will recover in a minute or two. I was just so when I went into my first battle." The young man said afterwards that it was as if an angel had come to him, and put new strength into him. The whole burden of his agony of fear was gone, and from that moment he was as brave as the oldest of the men. If the officer had dealt sternly with the midshipman, he might have driven him to cowardly failure. His kindly sympathy with him dispelled all fear, put courage into his heart and made him brave for battle.

It is thus that Christ is touched with a feeling of our infirmity when, assailed by sudden temptation, we quail and are afraid. He comes up close beside us and says, "I understand.

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“I met a temptation just like yours, that tried me very sorely. I felt the same dread you feel. I suffered bitterly that day. I remember it. Be brave and strong and your fear will vanish and you will be victorious.” Then he takes our hand and the thrill of his sympathy and of his strength comes into our hearts, dispelling all fear.

This truth of the sympathy of Christ with human weakness has comfort for those who strive to live perfectly, and yet are conscious of coming short. Our Master sets us an absolutely flawless ideal. He bids us to be perfect even as our Father who is in heaven is perfect. He gives us his own peace. He never became anxious about anything. Nothing disturbed the serenity and composure of his mind. No wrong done to him ever vexed him or aroused resentment or bitterness in his heart. No insult ever ruffled his temper. He never dreaded the future, however full it was of calamity. He never doubted that God was good, and that blessing would come out of every experience, however dark it might be.

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This peace of Christ is to be ours. We are to live as he did, reproducing the quiet, the love, the truth, the calmness of Christ in our lives. That is the ideal. But after hearing a sermon on the Christian perfection to which the Master exhorts his followers, one person said, "I am afraid I am not a Christian. My life falls far below the standard. I do not have unbroken peace. I am often disturbed in my mind and lose control of my feelings and of my speech."

This experience is well-nigh universal. If the lesson of perfection were the last word in the description of a Christian life, if no one can be called a Christian unless he measures up to the lofty standard, how many of us can call ourselves Christians? When a critic in the presence of Turner complained that a picture of his on exhibition was not perfect, the great artist said, "Perfect! You do not know how hard that is." When any one complains that our lives are not perfect, he does not know how hard it is to reach that lofty ideal.

Here it is that the truth of Christ's sym-

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pathy with our infirmities comes in with its comfort. Our Master wants us to live the perfect life, but he knows how weak we are, and is infinitely patient with us. A writer has said, "How many forwardnesses of ours does Christ smother? how many indignities does he pass by? and how many affronts does he endure at our hands, because his love is invincible and his friendship unchangeable? He rates every action, every sinful infirmity, with the allowances of mercy; and never weighs the sin, but together with it he weighs the force of the inducement—how much of it is to be attributed to choice, how much to the violence of the temptation, to the stratagem of the occasion, and the yielding frailties of weak nature."

Many of the words of Christ reveal his sympathy with weakness. In that most wonderful of all his promises, in which he invites the weary to him, promising them rest, he asks men to take his yoke upon them and then says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." It is not a yoke that crushes by its weight.

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He never lays upon his followers any burden which they cannot bear. His commandments are not grievous. He never calls us to any duties that we cannot perform. Whenever he lays a load upon us, he promises grace to carry it. He never suffers us to be tempted above what we are able to endure. There was never yet a responsibility put upon a Christian which was too great for his strength. No one ever is called to endure a sorrow which is sorer than he can bear.

Another word which shows his sympathy with human infirmities is quoted from one of the great prophets as being fulfilled in Christ himself: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench." What could be more worthless than a reed bruised, trampled in the dust? Yet so gentle is our Master that he does not fling aside as of no account even so worthless a thing as a shattered reed. There may be a little life remaining in it, and so he takes it up tenderly, cares for it gently, is patient with it and waits, until at length it lives again in delicate

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beauty. Or take the other figure: "Smoking flax shall he not quench." The lamp has burned down so that the flame has gone out, and there is only a little curling smoke coming from the black wick. Does he snuff it out and throw it away? Oh, no; such frailty appeals to him. "There may be a spark left yet," he says, and he breathes upon it, blowing it, putting oil again into the exhausted lamp, and in a little while there is a bright flame where there was only offensive smoke before.

After the terrible earthquake and fire at San Francisco, some children far out in the country were gathering up pieces of charred paper which had been carried by the currents of air. Among these fragments they found a partly burned leaf of the Bible. A boy found it and took it home to his father who smoothed it out and read for the first time the immortal words, "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, and the greatest of these is love." It was a strange message to come out of the great conflagration—strange,

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but wonderfully fitting. Everything else of beauty and power had gone down in dust and ashes, but love remained—that was imperishable, and faith and hope remained. Nothing is worth living for but love—God’s love and the love that it inspires. If we would be rich with riches which nothing can take from us, we must make larger room in our hearts for this love. Christ loves and has infinite compassion for weakness, for infirmity, for life’s bruised reeds and dimly burning wicks. We shall become like Christ only in the measure in which we get the same compassion into our hearts and are filled with a like sense of the weakness in others.

“Touched with a feeling of our infirmities.” This wonderful revealing of the heart of Christ in his glory should be full of comfort to those who with all their striving are unable to reach the perfect ideal. Christ understands. He sees into our hearts, and he knows when we have done our best, though that best fall so far below the standard. He knew when we tried to keep sweet-tempered in the provo-

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cation and irritation to which we were exposed yesterday, and yet failed, and spoke bitterly and impatiently. He knew when we wanted to be calm and trustful and to have quiet peace in our heart in some time of great sorrow, or in some sore loss or disappointment. Then when, in spite of our effort, the peace failed and we cried out—he knew what was due to unbelief in us and what to human weakness. We have a most patient Master. He is pitiful toward our infirmities. He is tolerant of our outbreaks. He is gentle toward our failures. Do not say you are not a Christian because you have failed so often, because you fall so far below what you ought to be. Christian life is a long, slow growth, beginning with infancy and reaching at last up to manhood.

But is it just to our patient, gracious Master that we remain always children, and never grow into full stature? We glory in the sympathy of Christ with our infirmities, but is it worthy of us always to have the infirmities and never to become any stronger? If he

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would have us accept his peace and learn the sweet lesson, is it worthy in us to go on, living a life of fret, discontent, and anxiety, of uncontrolled temper and ungoverned moods? Should we not try at least to please our Master in all things, even though we may never be able to live a single whole day without displeasing him in some way? It is the sincere effort that he accepts. If he knows that we have done our best, he holds us blameless though we are not faultless. But we should not take advantage of our Master's sympathy with our infirmities to continue in imperfect living and to keep the infirmities uncured, unstrengthened.

So let us keep the ideal unlowered—we dare not lower it. “Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” stands ever as the unmovable mark and goal of Christian life. Christ's patient sympathy with our failures and weaknesses never brings the standard down a single line to make it easier for us to reach it. There the ideal stands, and we are bidden to climb to it. St. Paul con-

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fessed that he had not yet attained to the goal, but said he was striving to reach it, ever pushing upward with all his energy, earnestness, and bravery of soul. Let us not in cowardly indolence live on forever on life's low levels—let us seek to climb to the heights. Let us set our feet a little higher every day, overcome some weakness, gain some new height.

“Touched with a feeling of our infirmities.” We may not always find sympathy in human hearts. Even those who ought to be most patient with us may fail to understand us, may prove exacting, severe, hard in judgment, harsh in blame, bitter in denunciation. But in the love of Christ we find infinite compassion, sympathy that never fails, never wearies. He remembers that we are dust. Only let us ever be true to him and always do our best, confessing our manifold failures and going on continually to better things.

Persis the Beloved

*“Why fret thee, soul,
For things beyond thy small control?
But do thy part, and thou shalt see
Heaven will have charge of them and thee.
Sow thou the seed, and wait in peace
The Lord’s increase.”*

*Weakness never need be falseness; truth is truth in each
degree
Thundered—pealed by God to nature, whispered by my
soul to thee.*

—ROBERT BROWNING.

CHAPTER SIX

Persis the Beloved



AMONG St. Paul's salutations to old friends at Rome is one to Persis. "Salute Persis the beloved, who labored much in the Lord."

There is no other mention of this woman in the New Testament. We do not know where St. Paul had known her. Her whole biography is given in the one little sentence. Probably she was obscure, though no one who works for Christ is really obscure. When we live a pure, true, unselfish life, though it be in a most quiet way, we cannot know the reach of what we are doing, how far its influence may extend, how much good it may do, how long it may be talked about. Persis labored somewhere, in some quiet way for Christ, nineteen hundred years ago. Her work was not much talked about then by the neighbors, but St. Paul told its story in a

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few words and here it stays in immortal beauty.

Centuries ago a little fern-leaf grew in a deep valley. Its veins were delicate, its fibres tender. But in a little while it fell and perished. It seemed to have done nothing, to have left no impression in the world. But the other day a party of geologists were going about in the interest of their science. One of them with his hammer broke off a piece of rock, and there he saw the fern—

*“Fairy pencillings, a quaint design,
Leafage, veining, fibres, clear and fine;
And the fern’s life lay in every line.
So, I think, God hides some souls away,
Sweetly to surprise us at the last day.”*

Persis lived without fame, and when she was gone a little while she was forgotten. But we open one of the New Testament pages, and there the story of her life lies in shining beauty.

Persis is called “the beloved.” We are not told why she was so universally beloved. No

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doubt her character was beautiful. Every Christian woman should seek to be lovely in her life. Beauty of face and feature is not the highest beauty. There is a story of a girl who was so homely that even her mother said to her, "You are so ugly that everybody will dislike you, and you will have no friends." The girl accepted the fact of her homeliness bravely, without being discouraged by it. "I will make my life so beautiful," she said, "that people will forget my face." So she set herself to cultivate her mind and spirit. She opened her heart to receive the fullness of Christ's love, until all the graces of the Spirit blossomed in her character. She grew so like her Master that people no longer thought of the homeliness of her face, but only of the loveliness of her character, the sweetness of her spirit, and the helpfulness of her life. She became an angel of goodness in the town where she lived. Beauty of face may win admiration; only beauty of heart, of disposition, of character can win love. Persis was called the beloved, not because of any merely

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physical attractiveness, but because she had in her the qualities of heart that made people love her.

A legend tells of the origin of the lovely moss rose. Once on a time, an angel came down to earth—the angel of flowers. Busied all day in his ministry here and there, he became weary and sought a place to rest, finding it under a rose. There he slept and was refreshed. Before returning to heaven he spoke to the rose, grateful for the shelter he had enjoyed, and offered to bestow upon it some new gift of loveliness. So soft green moss grew round the stem, making the beautiful moss rose, the loveliest of all the flowers. The life that gives the most gracious hospitality to Christ receives new charms, new gifts of loveliness.

It is said also of Persis that she “labored much in the Lord.” She was not a beautiful saint merely, living in holy seclusion, cherishing devout feelings and cultivating lovely qualities of character; she was a saint who sought to do all she could in advancing the

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cause of Christ. She labored, "labored much." That is, she was not content to do little easy things for her Master, but was eager to do all she could do.

It is said further that she labored "in the Lord." Does this mean that she labored as in the atmosphere of Christ's life? St. Paul in speaking of God, said, "In him we live, and move, and have our being." God is about us as the air is, and we live in him as we live in the atmosphere that surrounds us. It is said that one of the finest orchids in the world is found in England, but owing to the inclement climate it grows in dwarfed form, destitute of beauty, and is of no value. Climate is everything for fine plants. Spiritual climate is everything in the growth of heavenly graces. It is a great thing to live and work with the very atmosphere of Christ's love about us, with the very life of Christ for climate.

But that is not all that is meant when it is said that Persis labored in the Lord. It means that there was such a vital relation between Christ and Persis that wherever she spoke,

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Christ was in her words, that when she loved, Christ's love mingled in hers, that whatever she did in trying to help, bless and save others, Christ's power wrought in and through her feebleness, making it effective. That is what St. Paul said about himself to the Galatians. "It is no longer I that live but Christ that liveth in me." A distinguished scientific man believes that the seeds of living things now growing on the earth were first brought to our planet by aerolites, meteoric stones. The thought is very beautiful. But whether true or not, we are sure that the seeds of the beautiful things of spiritual life which grow now wherever the gospel has gone, the plants and flowers of grace and love, have come from heaven, not borne to us on meteoric stones, but in the life of Jesus Christ. Every true Christian is a new incarnation—Christ lives in him. When it said of Persis that she labored much in the Lord, the meaning is that she had Christ in her and that it was Christ who did the things that Persis did. The much labor she wrought for

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Christ was divinely inspired. An old writer says—

*“Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem
be born,
If he’s not born in thee, thy soul is all forlorn.
God’s Spirit falls on me as dewdrops on a rose,
If I but, like a rose, my heart to him disclose.
In all eternity no tone can be so sweet
As when man’s heart with God’s in unison doth
beat.”*

It is when we let Christ live in us and work in us and through us that our lives begin to tell for God. We cannot be a blessing to others until we are blessed ourselves. But when Christ lives in us, we cannot but be a blessing to every life we touch. There is an immense difference between your doing something, teaching a lesson, preaching a sermon, visiting a sick neighbor, training a child, seeking to comfort one in sorrow—between your doing the work yourself, and Christ doing it in you and through you. In the one case it is a piece of beautiful human service; in the other case it is human service filled with

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divine love and grace. In the one case, it is you working—teaching, preaching, visiting, striving to make a life better—in the other, it is you and Christ working together.

There is another suggestive word in St. Paul's salutation. In the same chapter he speaks of Tryphæna and Tryphosa "who labor in the Lord." The tense is present—they were still active. But Persis had "labored." Her working time was over. She was still living, for St. Paul sent a kindly salutation to her, but she was no longer engaged in activities.

We are not told why Persis had ceased to work. Perhaps she was an invalid, unable longer to carry on her former activities. Or she may have become old and infirm. Some people chafe and are greatly discouraged when they become broken in health. They used to be strong, able for anything, undaunted in the presence of the greatest labors, laughing in the face of all obstacles. They responded to every call of duty with alacrity. They labored much. Now they can only lie on their

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bed, or sit in their wheel chair to be rolled about—they cannot do any work. It takes more grace to keep patient and sweet, to be joyous and cheerful, in this broken condition, than it required in other days to be busy in the field of service. Yet we are no less the Lord's servants when we cannot work any more than we were when we were most active. "They also serve who only stand and wait." If standing and waiting are all that we can do, we please our Master just as well and serve him just as acceptably as we used to do when we were most active, that is if we do not spoil all by chafing and fretting. Our work is not all doing things; we need also to have things done in us. There are lessons to learn which perhaps we never could learn if in the midst of unhindered activities. Certain song birds when they are to be taught a new song, are shut away in a darkened room for a time, and the song is sung or played over and over within their hearing until they learn it. May it not be thus with us oftentimes? Our Master wants us to learn a new song—the

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song of contentment, of peace, of uncomplaining joy, and we are called aside from our rushing activity, that in the quiet we may get the song into our heart.

We think the world cannot spare us, that things will not go on at all if we cannot go back to our place and our activity. We think that even Christ's work will suffer if we have to withdraw from it. Have you ever taken notice of the way the world does when a busy man is suddenly called from his desk, stricken down, his place left empty? Does anything stop? Does his withdrawal leave a great unfilled gap? The first day or two there may be a little confusion, but in a short while the great system of work that he had organized and was conducting, and which he and his friends thought could not be kept in operation without the guidance and skill of his master hand, was going on just as before. Have you noticed that when some wise and active Christian, with hands full of great tasks which it was thought no other one could do, was called away by death, there was but

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little disturbance or interruption in the progress of the work? By the time the friends returned from the funeral, all was going on in other hands as if nothing had happened. We think we are far more important to the world, even to our Master's kingdom, than we are.

So we need not vex ourselves about our duties when we cannot do them longer—they are not our duties at all any more. Yesterday they were, and there would have been a blank if we had not attended to them. But they are not ours to-day, when our hand has no longer the strength for them. We should learn the lesson of contentment and trust when called out of action. Yesterday it was our duty to attend to our work; to-day it is our duty to lie still and be quiet, and to keep sweet. Instead of active service, our part now is to endure patiently, to cultivate humility, gentleness, and patience.

When the Jews celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, they make their booths of branches so light and thin that they can see the stars

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through them. Through all interruptions and disappointments, through all suffering or pain, all breaking up of plans, we should be sure that the stars be not hindered in their shining upon us, into our lives. Nothing must shut heaven out of our view. When we are called aside from active duty by illness, by invalidism or by old age, we should obey the Master's new call to come apart and rest awhile, and be quiet and still, just as cheerfully as ever we responded to a call to glad work and service. When our working time is over, the form of duty changes for us—that is all. Before, it was diligence and faithfulness in strenuous work; now, it is patience and joy in keeping still. The one is just as much obedience as the other, and pleases God just as well.

Then we must not think that we are useless when we cannot work as we used to do. No doubt Persis was doing just as much for the honor of Christ, for the upbuilding of his kingdom and for the sweetening and enriching of the world, in those quiet days when she

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was able to labor no more, as she did in the days now gone, when she labored much. There was a work going on in her in the quiet days—she was mellowing and ripening in spirit. Then she touched the friends about her by her peace, her contentment. If she was a sufferer, she suffered in patience, sweetly, submissively, songfully. Then she could still work in prayer, and no work we ever do for others is so effective as what we may do on our knees.

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Nothing is small!
No lily-muffled hum of summer bee
But finds some coupling with the spinning stars;
No pebble at your foot but proves a sphere;
. . . Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.

—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

CHAPTER SEVEN

This Beginning of His Signs



THE only miracles of Jesus' thirty silent years were miracles of love, of obedience, of duty, of beautiful living. When we remember who he was, the Son of God, in whom all divine fullness dwelt, his making no manifestation of glory those years was as great a miracle as when at length he began to do unusual things.

The first recorded appearance of Jesus, after entering on his public ministry, was at a wedding feast. This tells us of his interest in human joys. Many people seem to think that religion is only for times of sorrow. They say that Christ came to help us in our hours of pain and in our troubles. But it is suggestive that his first manifestation of divine power was not in healing a sick man, opening a blind man's eyes, raising a dead child, but

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in making wine to prolong the joy of a feast. He is a friend for our happy hours quite as much as for our hours of sadness. Jesus wants still to attend the social pleasures that the young people have. If we have any feasts or entertainments to which we cannot invite him, they are not fit enjoyments for a Christian.

“The wine failed.” Earth’s pleasures always fail. They come in little cups, not in living fountains. The failing wine at the wedding feast is an emblem of every joy that is only human. It lasts a little while and then the cup is empty. Human love is very sweet. But if there is nothing but the human it will fail some time.

The record says that in this first miracle Jesus manifested his glory. The glory was no diviner when it took the form of power and wrought a miracle than it was when unrevealed. During the thirty years the divine life in Christ revealed itself in what no one regarded as supernatural—in the beautiful life that grew up in that home, with its at-

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tention to daily tasks and duties. The neighbors did not think of his gentleness of spirit, his graciousness of disposition, his purity and simplicity of life as revealings of divine glory in him. Then that day at Cana the glory was manifested, flashed out so as to be seen.

We do not begin to be aware of the divine glory that is about us all these common days. We say there are no miracles now. In the life of Christ there were countless simple and beautiful deeds wrought continually. During that marriage feast Jesus probably was the life of the company. He was unselfish. If there was a bashful person among the guests, Jesus was specially kind to him. If there was one whom all the others neglected, Jesus took an interest in him. If there were any sad or sorrowing ones in the company, Jesus sought them out and spoke words of cheer and comfort to them. There is no doubt that his presence was a benediction to all the guests at the wedding. But nobody thought of these common kindnesses as miracles. Then next hour

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he changed water into wine, and instantly all were amazed and saw in this an evidence that he was divine.

What is glory? It means power, splendor, greatness, honor. What was the glory that this particular miracle manifested? For one thing it showed Christ's power over nature. There were several of these nature miracles. With a few loaves he fed a multitude of hungry men. Here he provides wine for the company of wedding guests. He showed his power over the elements by quieting the storm and stilling the waves of the sea with a word. He was perfectly at home in all the fields of nature. There ought to be great comfort for us in these truths. Our Master is master of all things. This is his world.

But the miracle meant more than this. Why was this miracle wrought? Not to make a display of the power of Christ. Not merely to show his disciples that he was divine. Every miracle he wrought was wrought as an act of mercy or love. This beginning of signs was simply a beautiful deed of com-

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mon kindness. Some one calls this the house-keeper's miracle. It was a most embarrassing situation. In the midst of the feast the wine failed. There were more guests than were expected, and there was not enough wine to serve them all. The host would have been disgraced if there had been no way of adding to the too meagre supply. Jesus, by manifesting his power, relieved the awkwardness of the occasion. He wrought the miracle, primarily, for the sake of the host, to save him from mortification.

There are those who think it dishonoring to our Master to say that he has a care for the little frets and worries of a poor family, or that he is concerned in the small affairs of a common household. They think his glory lifts him above all such trivial things. But there really is no perplexity too small to take to him. He manifested his glory here in just this—his thoughtful kindness.

We know that the divinest thing in this world is love. That in God which is greatest is not power, not the shining splendor of deity, but

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love, which shows itself in plain, lowly ways. When the disciples came to the Master, saying, "Show us the Father," they were thinking of some brilliant display, some revealing of God which would startle men. Jesus replied, "Have I been so long with you and yet have you not known me?" He meant that the truest revealing of God to men is not in great theophanies, but in a ministry of gentleness, helpfulness, and kindness, such as Jesus had wrought through all the years.

Mrs. Browning tells us that nature is full of the glory of God. Every common bush is afire with God for those who have eyes to see the brightness. But the truth is that most of us have no eyes for the splendor. Here and there is one who, in the presence of God's revealing, takes off his shoes in reverence. But people in general see nothing of divine glory, and only "sit round and eat blackberries."

The woman at the well was disposed at first to treat trivially the weary man who sat on the well curb and asked her for a drink of water. Then Jesus told her that if she only

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knew who it was that was talking to her she would ask of him the largest blessings of grace. We all rob ourselves continually of untold blessings which might easily be made ours if we knew the Christ who is always so near to us.

Jesus changed water, common water, into wine. He is able to work like miracles continually in our lives. Many of us do not attain the best in any phase or department of our life. We get only common water, which our Lord would make into rich wine, if we would accept the miracle at his hands. To many business men, business is only business, very earthly business at that. If only they would let Christ make it over for them, business would become as holy, as beautiful, as sacred, as a communion service. St. Paul teaches us to do all things in the name of Christ. If we would do this, all our secular affairs, as we call them, would become as holy as angel ministries. Jesus himself was a workingman for many years. But we know there was nothing sordid about his work. He did it

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all for God, and he made each piece of it beautiful enough to show to God at the close of the day.

We do not get the best out of our friendships. How many of us lift them up into anything like what the friendship of Jesus and John, or Jesus and Mary, must have been? How many of us who are friends, kneel often side by side and pray together? Do not most of our friendships run along on very common levels? Jesus is able to work his miracle on these friendships of ours, changing the water into wine, making them into divine fellowships.

We do not get the best out of our Christian life. We join a church, but we do not allow the church to enter deeply into our life or to mean much to us. We do not allow the Master to possess us wholly, body and soul. We do not discover the possibilities of prayer. We do not have the Holy Spirit in our hearts as guest in an absorbing measure. The other day a man was apologizing for something he had done, something that was not beautiful.

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He said he was one of those “diamonds in the rough” with which Christ could not do much. He never could be made into a sweet, happy, lovely Christian, he said. He thought he was more like Peter than John. He was reminded that even Peter, with all his original faults and roughnesses, became at length a noble and Christlike man. At first, during his training, he was rash and impetuous, and talked too much, but he was always sorry for his mistakes and then grew out of them. It will not do to hide behind Peter, when our religion lacks in beauty, unless, like Peter, too, we leave our faults behind and grow in grace and loveliness.

There are some professing Christians whose life is not beautiful. In St. Paul’s wonderful cluster of “whatsoevers,” summing up the qualities which should find their place in Christian character, there are two which never should be wanting — “whatsoever things are lovely,” and “whatsoever things are of good report.” It is not enough to be true, just, and honest—these sturdy elements

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are essential, but our lives must also be beautiful, and what people say about us must be such as shall honor the holy name we bear. Some people are honest but crabbed. They do good deeds, but do them in a most ungracious way. They attend meetings and talk a great deal about religion, freely criticising other Christians, but are not winsome themselves, not humble, though they praise humility, nor devout, though they talk much about other people's undevoutness. There are some good men whose lives are really full of good works, who will go miles to do a kindness, who are faithful in all personal duties, who never omit prayer or church attendance; but whose influence as Christians is far from sweet and winning. They are like certain nuts which have a meaty kernel, but a prickly burr. When they do you a favor you almost wish they had not, they hurt you so in doing it.

This miracle suggests to us that Christ can make our life richer and more beautiful, if we will put it into his hands, that if we live

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with him as we may, our characters will grow every day into greater sweetness and loveliness. A Christian man has no right to be hard to get along with. Even if other people are unlovely in spirit, he must be lovely. If others are selfish, he must be unselfish. If others are rude, he must be refined. We should set for ourselves the highest ideal of beauty, and then strive to reach it. "Let not your good be evil spoken of." Do your gracious deeds graciously. Make your honesty and truth beautiful. Take care that your zeal is not censorious and uncharitable. Let your earnestness be gentle and kind. Judge not that ye be not judged. Speak evil of no man—leave his faults to his Master. Look after yourself, your own flaws and motes and beams—you will have quite enough to do—and let Christ be the judge of other people's faults. Strive to be the sweetest, truest, noblest, holiest, most useful Christian you can be, and do not talk about it. "Moses wist not that his face shone."

The picture of the life of Charles Kingsley

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which his wife has given in her "Letters and Memories" of her husband is one of the finest groupings of the qualities of an ideal life in all literature:

*Dedicated to the beloved memory of a righteous
man*

Who loved God and truth above all things.

A man of untarnished honor—

Loyal and chivalrous—gentle and strong—

Modest and humble—tender and true—

Pitiful to the weak—yearning after the erring—

Stern to all forms of wrong and oppression,

Yet most stern towards himself—

Who, being angry, yet sinned not—

Whose highest virtues were known only

*To his wife, his children, his servants, and the
poor ;*

Who lived in the presence of God here,

And passing through the grave and gate of death

Now liveth unto God for evermore.

Shall we not seek and pray that this beginning of his signs the Master may work in us? Then we shall have the same glory in us that was also in him. We need not ask for power to work miracles, but let us beseech God for

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glory in our hearts and lives—the glory of love, of gentleness, of truth, of patience, of thoughtfulness, of kindness, of forbearance, of humility, of helpfulness. Then the glory of our life will be manifested, not in an occasional flash of surpassing heroism, self-denial, generosity, effort, or sacrifice, but in a daily life of unbroken goodness, faithfulness and holiness.

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*“We must buy and sell in the markets, we must earn our
daily bread.*

*But just in the doing of these usual acts, may the soul
be helped and fed.*

*It is not by keeping the day’s work and the day’s prayer
separate so,*

*But by mixing the prayer with the labor that the soul is
taught to grow.*

*“For sweeping a room by God’s law, is a service he
deigns to bless,*

*And mending a kettle worthily, is working for him no
less*

*Than steering steady the ship of state, or wielding the
sword in war,*

*Or lifting the soul of man by songs to the heights where
the angels are.”*

CHAPTER EIGHT

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ONE of the later Old Testament prophets predicts a coming golden age when the bells of the horses shall be as sacred as the garments of the high priest, and the common cooking utensils in the people's homes as holy as the vessels of the temple. St. Paul teaches this lesson when he says, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." This covers all our acts and all our words. It applies to our Bible-reading, but not less to our other reading. We must read our morning newspaper, our Tennyson, our school text-books, in the name of the Lord, so as to honor him and to get knowledge that will add to the beauty and the strength of our life. We are to pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, but we are also to go to our busi-

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ness in the same blessed name. We regard the Lord's house as holy, and say that we should do nothing in it but that which is reverent, which yields honor and praise to God. True; but the house we live in is sacred also, and nothing ever should take place in it which would not be fitting and proper to do in the presence of Christ himself.

We think of certain acts as worship and as we enter upon them we hear a voice saying, "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." But where is God not present? Where shall we go any common day that it is not holy ground? There may be no burning bush, but God is there as really as he was when Moses came suddenly upon the symbol of his presence in the desert. We believe that we are doing good work when we are teaching a Sunday-school class; are those doing God's work any less truly who on week days teach classes of little children or young people in public or private schools? We con-

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sider it a most sacred duty to sit down at the Lord's Table, at the service of the Holy Communion; but have you ever thought that there is also a sacredness scarcely less holy in sitting down together at our family meals? In the ideal religion, the bells on the horses' bridles are holy unto the Lord as well as the high priest's garments; and the pots used in the people's houses are as sacred as the vessels used in the temple.

When we learn this lesson, Christian life will have its true meaning and glory for us. Nothing will then appear commonplace. We will never think of our occupation as lowly, for the lowliest work, if it be God's will for us for the hour, will be heavenly in its splendor, because it is what we are set by our Master to do. Our God is not only the God of the sanctuary and the solemn worship—he is just as much the God of the workshop, the factory, the sewing-room and the kitchen. We please him just as well when we live sweetly and do our work faithfully in the lowly place, amid temptation, care and wear-

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ness, as we do when we honor and worship him at the communion.

We think we are in this world to attend to a certain business, to perform certain professional duties, to look after certain household affairs, to be a carpenter, a stonemason, a painter, a teacher, a housekeeper—we call these our vocations. But as God thinks of us we are in these occupations to grow into noble and worthy character. While we are making things, God is making men. With him a carpenter shop is not merely a place for making doors, sashes and banisters, and for planing boards—it is a place to build character, to make men. A home is not merely a place for doing beautiful housekeeping—it is a place to develop fine womanhood.

Dr. R. F. Horton, of London, has suggested that the names of the days should be changed, since they are all called by ancient heathen names. He would have them renamed after great and good Christian men. It may not be possible to do anything of this kind, but it ought to be possible for every Chris-

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tian to write the name of Christ at the head of every day. Some people seem to think that if they keep the Lord's day white and holy in a fashion, they may stain Monday and the other week days with all manner of evil. But we are learning that Monday belongs to God as truly as Sunday. The ancient commandment reads, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." The new commandment, however, reads, "Remember the week days, to keep them holy."

The true Christian consecration will make all business holy. It has been said that the application of the Ten Commandments to business and to politics is only an iridescent dream, something entirely impossible. Nevertheless, there the commandments stand, given not for Sundays only, but for week days as well; not for the quiet life of the home alone, but just as truly for the marts of trade, for the mill, the factory, the shop, the counting-room. "Do not trouble yourself too much," said Michael Angelo to a young sculptor who was anxious about the light for the proper

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exhibition of his piece of statuary, "do not trouble yourself too much about the light on your statue; the light of the public square will test its value." It would be easy in the studio to pose the marble so as to bring out its fine qualities and conceal its faults; but the statue will have to be set up on the street by and by, and there no posing, no arrangement of light and shade will hide its defects. It is not enough that in the church on Sunday men appear good, true, honest and devout. Our Christian profession must stand the light of the street, of the public square. We must have our honesty tested in our business transactions, our truthfulness tried and proved in our common intercourse with men, our devoutness of manner subjected to the sneers and profanities of ungodly people.

Jesus himself gave as the rule of his life, "I do always those things that please him—my Father." Every friend of Christ should be able to say the same thing. All who bear Christ's name should live so carefully in their business affairs that no reproach ever shall

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come back to the name of the church from anything any of them may do during the week, in their common work. It never should be said of any of them, "He is an enthusiastic Christian on Sunday, but on Monday he drives sharp bargains, he takes advantage of others, he does not pay his debts, he is not honest, he oppresses the poor, he does not live a clean, pure life." Ruskin found on a church in Venice these words engraved, "Round this temple let the merchant's weights be true, his judgments just, his contracts without guile." This is a good motto for all Christian men in their business affairs.

Even the play and the amusement of a Christian are part of his Christian life. They must be as holy as his devotions. We need not wear long faces. Nor need we condemn pleasure. The Master did not. His first public act after his baptism and temptation was to attend a wedding feast and we know he cast no shadow over the gladness and festivity of that occasion. He smiled on the children's

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play—they never were afraid of him, did not run and hide when they saw him coming, as some children used to do when they saw the minister riding up to their house. He was not like the Pharisees who posed as saintly and made their religion unbeautiful and unwelcome. He wants us to be happy, to have his joy fulfilled in us. But our pleasure, our amusement, must always be pure, holy, unselfish—sacred as our worship.

Some one gives this singular definition: "Temperament—an excuse for character." A man is gloomy and pessimistic, and he blames it on his temperament—he was born that way. One person always sees faults and disagreeable things in people and in circumstances, and excuses himself for this unhappy characteristic on the ground of temperament. Another man has a fiery temper which flares up on the slightest provocation. He received the Holy Communion on Sunday, and then on Monday was seen in a terrible rage. "It is my temperament," he says, "I can't help it."

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All of which is pure fiction. Temperament is no excuse for faulty character, for unchristian disposition, for ungoverned tempers. Because we are Christ's we must see that we never dishonor his name by such outbursts. He is always with us and is grieved when we fail to keep our lives holy. What did you do yesterday out among people? How did you treat those with whom you work? What beauty of Christ did you show in your conduct, in your disposition, in your behavior? What patience did you exercise? What thoughtfulness did you manifest? What unkindness did you endure quietly? What rising anger did you restrain? Was your day full of words, acts and dispositions that were as holy as a prayer?

One asks: "Do we want to know ourselves? Then let us ask every day: 'How have I met the drudgery of my regular work? How have I treated those who work beside me or who have claims upon me? How have I kept my temper over little worries? How often have I looked to God and toward high ideals? What

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thoughts have been my companions?’ Here are the real, accurate tests of character. They do not give us an easy time of it. But they are true. According as the answers to them are satisfactory or not we are growing or weakening in character and becoming fit—or unfit—for the revealing crisis when it comes.”

Home tests us. It ought not to be so, but perhaps no other place tests our Christian consecration more severely than our home. Its very sweetness seems to free us from the restraint we feel in the presence of strangers. Those who do not love us would not endure the words and acts which we sometimes compel our dearest to bear from us. It is pitiful to think how often those who stand for Christ in his church, and who elsewhere witness a good confession for him, in their own homes seem to feel themselves absolved from all the courtesies and amenities of love, even of good manners.

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*“Studied, folded, and laid away
Manners too fine for every day!
The graceful bow and the gentle touch
That cost so little and mean so much;
The smile that charms like the rare perfume
Of a rose-jar hid in a shadowy room;
The song from the twilight nook apart
That finds its way to a burdened heart;
The yielding of self and of selfish ends,
Reserved for the plaudits of transient friends:
This—this—the cruel sneer provokes—
‘Anything goes with one’s own folks.’”*

It ought not to be hard to love our own and to show our love to them in all sweet and gentle ways. Surely we ought to take to our own love’s best. Yet Christians, those bearing the name of Christ, have been known to go right from the Holy Communion to their own homes and instantly to break out in bitter words, in carping and criticism, in blame and faultfinding, in ill temper and disgraceful accusations. If there is any place in this world which should be holy to us, which should be like the very house of God to us, sacred as the Lord’s Supper, and which

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should call out our deepest reverence, our warmest love, it is our own home. If we are Christians anywhere in this world, let it be in our own home, where we are so loved and trusted. If we must be sullen, bitter, gloomy, selfish and sour, somewhere, let it not be where our loved ones wait for us and where their hearts cry out for tenderness.

One of the most pathetic sentences George Eliot ever wrote is this: "Oh, the anguish of the thought that we can never atone to our dead for the stinted affection we gave them, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know." Let us not fail to make our home life sacred and holy. If even on the bells of the horses we write, "Holy unto the Lord," let us not neglect to make the home in which we dwell, pray, live and love, a fit place for Christ to tarry in, a sweet and gentle place for our dear ones to grow up in.

Doing Impossible Things

*“Here let us pause,” he said,
At peep of dawn;
“Nay, comrade, let our tread
Lead up and on!”*

*“Here let us pause!” he cried,
When noontide shone;
“Nay, comrade, let our stride
Lead up and on!”*

*“Here let us pause!”—his gaze
The night upon;
“Nay, comrade, let our ways
Lead up and on!”*

*“Here let us pause!”—O heart,
Till life be gone,
Ever the braver part
Leads up and on!*

CHAPTER NINE

Doing Impossible Things



WE too easily set limits to our own ability. We do not know our own power. We face a difficulty and think we cannot master it, and do not try. Any of us might accomplish a great deal more than we do. Jesus said, "All things are possible with God." The preposition "with" is the key to the meaning of this saying. Many persons take the words to mean only that God can do everything, that nothing is impossible to him. But what Jesus says is that a man with God can do impossible things. We know that God is omnipotent. Job said, "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained." It gives us confidence, in the midst of dangers, in the face of enemies, or when troubles are about us, to know that God is stronger than the

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strongest. "If God is for us, who is against us?" When we have some duty to do which is too hard for us with our little power, it gives us immeasurable comfort to know that God can do it. Yet God does not do our duty for us.

But we are coworkers with God. We cannot do our hard tasks ourselves, neither will God do them for us—God and we must do them. Nothing is impossible to one who works with God. So we may not indolently roll the responsibility of hard tasks and duties off our shoulders, even upon God. Whatever is given to us to do, we must accept and must accomplish. We have nothing to do, however, with the question of ability. Back of us is all the strength of the mighty God, and with this we can do the impossible if it is God's will for us.

Many of the miracles of Christ are illustrations of this truth. He did not do for any one by divine power what the person could do with his own strength. He did not himself, by an act of his own, change the young rul-

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er's heart; he bade him voluntarily to give up his money, which he loved, and follow him. If he had done this Christ would have entered his heart and changed it. When Jesus healed the man with a withered arm, he did not put life into the arm as it hung helpless by the man's side. He bade him stretch it forth, requiring him to use his own power of will. When he did this the arm became strong. To the man himself the restoring of the arm was impossible; but to the man with God it became easily possible.

It was impossible for the disciples to feed the hungry multitude on the hillside. Yet Jesus said, "Give ye them to eat." It was an impossible duty therefore to which he set them. Yet they set about to obey his commandment as if it had been some easiest thing to do. They did not say, "Master, we cannot do it." They simply began to do what he told them to do. Then as they began to carry the bread to the people, it increased and continued to increase, until all the five thousand were satisfied.

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Thus are we coworkers with God in all our life, in all our duties, in all our struggles. We cannot do these things ourselves. "With men it is impossible." But, on the other hand, God does not do the things for us. "All things are possible with God." That is, all things are possible for us, with God. This is a most practical teaching. To each of us the Master gives a work which is altogether our own. No one can evade his own personal responsibility. Neither can any one say, "I cannot do anything." You cannot alone, but with God, that is, working with God, there is nothing that is impossible to you. This is not your work, it is not God's—it is yours and God's.

It is by faith that we thus become coworkers with God. While Jesus and three of his disciples were on the Transfiguration Mount, a story of pitiful failure was being enacted at the foot of the mountain. A father had brought his epileptic son to the disciples during the night, asking them to cure him. The disciples tried, but could not do it.

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When Jesus came down in the morning, the father brought the son to him. "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us," cried the father, in his distress. The "if" revealed the weakness of the man's faith. Nothing could be done for the boy while this "if" remained in the father's heart. Even Jesus, with his divine power, was balked in healing by the "if." "If thou canst!" Jesus replied. "All things are possible to him that believeth." Jesus could not do anything for the boy save through the father, and before the father could do anything the doubt must be taken out of his heart.

This incident has serious teaching for parents. Something is wrong with your child. It may be sickness, or it may be evil in some form. You bring the child to Christ, while your faith is small. You tell him your heart's burden of distress or anxiety, and then you say, "O Master, if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us." But your "if" tells of faltering faith. The blessing is

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within your reach, but it cannot yet come to your child because of your lack of faith. "If thou canst believe!" the Master answers in yearning love. "All things are possible to him that believeth." The healing, the helping, waits for faith in you.

There is more of this story. Jesus healed the boy. Then when the disciples were alone with him they asked him, "How is it that we could not cast it out?" Jesus answered, "Because of your little faith." Think of the impotence of these nine men! They tried to cast out the demon, but it defied them. Yet they need not have failed. They ought to have been able to cast it out. They had received Jesus as the Messiah. They loved him, they believed on him. But their faith was weak. Look at the case. Nine friends of Christ, disciples, too, ordained to do great things, baffled now, balked, failing to do a work of mercy because their faith was too little! Blessing, healing, kept from a poor distressed boy, because a company of Christ's friends had not faith enough!

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There is something startling in this when we begin to apply it to ourselves. We are Christ's, we love Christ, we follow him, we profess to believe on him, we are banded together for his service. About us are many who do not know their Lord, who have had no experience of his goodness. If these are to receive the blessing of Christ's love and grace, it must be through us. Do we never stand in the presence of great human needs, as the disciples did that night at the foot of the mountain? Do we ever fail to give help, to cure, to restore, to comfort, because of our little faith? Is there danger that Christ himself shall not be able to do mighty works of blessing in our community because of our unbelief? He will not do the mighty works, the gracious works, without us. We need not go to him in prayer when we come upon some great need—a man in the grip of temptation, a woman in deep sorrow, a child in distress, a soul unsaved—and ask him to do the work of love and grace. He says at once to us, "Go you and do it, and I will work with

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you." We must do the work—he will not do it without us, and if we do not do it, Christ's work in that case will fail, and the responsibility will be ours. At Nazareth it was said that Jesus could not do many mighty works because of the unbelief of the people. The suffering in the town went uncomforted and unrelieved because of the unbelief of the rulers. Is anybody going unhelped, uncomforted, unsaved about you, because your faith is so small, because there is no hand the Master can use?

What is the faith that has such power? It is the faith that so enters into Christ that it takes up into itself all the life of Christ, all that he is. It makes us one with him, so that where we are he is, his Spirit flowing through us. "Because I live, ye shall live also," said the Master. St. Paul puts it in a wonderfully vivid way when he says, "It is not I that live, but Christ living in me." This faith makes Christ and his friend not two, but one. It is this which enables him who believes to do impossible things. St.

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Paul says, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."

The standard of character which our Master sets for his followers is full of impossibilities. Did you ever seriously try to live the Sermon on the Mount for a week, or even for a day? Did you ever try to live the Beatitudes? If you did, you know how impossible these reaches of requirement seem. But when Christ enters into us and begins to live in us, we find that it is possible to begin to live out these impossible things.

Impossible things are expected of a Christian, just because he is a Christian. Anybody can do possible things. Possible things are the things of the ordinary natural life. It requires no heavenly grace, no divine strength, no superhuman skill, to do possible things. But the Christian should do impossible things, should live a life of truth, purity, and holiness, as far above the world's standard and reach as the sky is above the mountains. He should live a life of love, so patient, so thoughtful, so self-denying, that it

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shall prove in the eyes of all who see it immeasurably above this world's ideals of life. But we are satisfied with too low standards of Christian life. We are not as good as we ought to be. We are not as good as we might be. We are not doing the impossible things which our Master expects of us. Sometimes we read of heroisms wrought on mission fields. The careers of many missionaries are sublime in their faith, in their devotion, in their courage, in their readiness to lay down their lives for Christ. Our hearts are thrilled when we read the story of these faithful witnesses. They do impossible things, such things as none but Christians can do, because Christ is in them. He said, "Go, make disciples of all nations, and lo, I am with you."

When Raphael was asked the secret of his marvelous work, he said, "I feel the spirit of my mother bending over me when I paint." When we ask why a Christian can do impossible things, it is because the Spirit of Christ is bending over him. A Christian in himself is only a man of common mold. He has no

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more wisdom, strength or goodness than any other man. He has all the frailties, the infirmities, the imperfections and faults of other men. But a Christian is a common man plus Jesus Christ. Christ has added himself to him—his strength, his goodness, his love, his divine life. A Christian is a man with God.

In the later days of Grecian art, a prize was offered for the best statue of one of the goddesses. A youth in the country who loved this goddess set to work to compete for the prize. But he lacked the artist's gift and experience, and his statue was crude and clumsy, far from beautiful. It seemed to have no chance at all for winning the prize. But the goddess, so the heathen legend runs, knowing of the sincere devotion of this youth to her and his love for her, when the time came for the display of the statues in the competition, entered herself into the crude stone, and at once it glowed with divine beauty, by far the most beautiful of all the statues, winning the prize.

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We are called to show the world the beauty of Christ, to reproduce the glory of his life, not in cold marble, but in Christian character, in Christian spirit, in Christian service. In our weakness and faultiness it may seem to us that we cannot do anything, that our life and work are unworthy of the holy name we bear. Our best seems most unlovely, crude, faulty, imperfect; but if we truly love Christ, if we truly believe on him, and if at his command we strive to do that which seems impossible, Christ himself, knowing our love, and seeing our striving, will enter into our life and fill it with himself. Then our poor efforts will become radiant and divine in their beauty. Able to do nothing worthy in ourselves, when Christ adds his own blessed life to ours, we shall have power to do the things that are impossible.

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*“If all the skies were sunshine,
Our faces would be fain
To feel once more upon them
The cooling splash of rain.*

*“If all the world were music,
Our hearts would often long
For one sweet strain of silence
To break the endless song.*

*“If life were always merry,
Our souls would seek relief
And rest from weary laughter
In the quiet arms of grief.”*

CHAPTER TEN

Crosses



ESUS said, "If any man would come after me, let him . . . take up his cross daily and follow me." Many people misread these words. They suppose Jesus refers to his own cross, telling us that if we would be his followers we must bear his cross. That is true in a sense. The Christian Church is an army of cross-bearers. But the meaning here is, that every Christian has a cross of his own which he must take up and carry loyally after his Master.

There are crosses which we make for ourselves. A child could not understand what a cross in life is, and the father explained it in this way. A cross is composed of two pieces of wood, one longer, one shorter. The shorter piece represents our will, and the longer God's will. Lay the pieces side by side and no

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cross is formed. But lay the shorter across the longer, and there is a cross. Whenever our will falls athwart God's will, we have a cross. We make a cross for ourselves when we refuse to take God's way, to accept his will, or when we chafe or fret at anything God sends us. When, however, we quickly accept what God gives, and yield in sweet acquiescence to the divine will, we have no crosses to carry.

Yet there are many people who fill their lives with crosses by refusing to let God have his way with them. Much physical illness and pain are produced by violation of law, and the suffering endured in consequence is self-inflicted. Much of the trouble in people's lives they bring upon themselves by their indiscretions, follies and evil habits. Then there are those who make crosses for themselves by magnifying their common ills, by dwelling on their troubles, by brooding over imaginary evils until their moderate share of mortal infelicities grows into a seeming mountain of calamities. If all the crosses we

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make for ourselves were taken out of our lives, we should not have many left. Far more than we realize or could be made to believe, are we the authors of our own troubles.

We make many crosses for each other. We do not know what it costs other people to live with us. There is a great deal of selfishness in the world, even in the best Christians, and selfishness makes life hard for others. There is much thoughtlessness in even the best human love, and thoughtlessness continually makes suffering in gentle hearts. Marriage is the most sacred and holy of all human relationships, but there are few even among those most congenially and most happily wedded, who do not make many crosses for each other. They do not mean to do it—they love each other and it is in their hearts always to give cheer, happiness and comfort. But unconsciously they say and do things continually which give pain and make crosses.

Or it may be in what they do not do, in neglect of love's duties. With most good people

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it is in the lack of kindnesses rather than in words or deeds of unkindness that unlovingness is chiefly wrought.

*“So many tender words and true
I meant to say, dear love, to you:
So many things I meant to do—
But I forgot.”*

There are parents who lay crosses on their children. There is no love more unselfish than a father's and a mother's, yet there are children in some homes that starve for love's daily bread. Some one says that children do not dream of the fire under the snow in the reticent nature of their parents. Yes, but the fire of parental love never should be buried under any snow of conventionality, of pride, of coldness, of reserve. The parent lays a heavy cross on the life of a child when he withholds love's warmth and affectionateness.

In all life's relations there is a great deal of cross-making for others. A man who pledges his troth to a woman at the marriage altar.

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promising "in all love and honor, in all faith and tenderness," to cherish her in the wedded bond, should be most watchful never to lay a rough cross on her gentle heart. A woman who makes a like covenant with a man, as his wife, should be most careful never to lay a cross on his faithful love, to make his burden harder. There are children, too, who make heavy crosses which their parents have to carry. In all relations of friendship this cross-making is going on all the time. We think we are ideal friends, but in thoughtless moments we cause bitter pain to those we love most truly. Some of us are exacting and unreasonable in our demands upon our friends. We make the standard not ministering to, but to be ministered unto. We are envious or jealous. We have our petty whims and caprices. We give way to temper and rash speech. A great many Christian people are quite ready to confess that their temper is their besetting sin, but frequently, there is little sincerity in such confession. Somehow, giving way to bad temper is such a common sin that few

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are ashamed of it. No one can well reprove another for what he does himself continually. Yet it is only just that we should think of the crosses we make for others by our miserable outbreaks of temper.

In business relations too, and in social life, we are cross-makers. We are not easy to get along with. We are domineering and inconsiderate. We drive hard bargains. We disappoint people who trust us. We borrow and do not repay. We promise and do not keep our promises. We pledge friendship and do not prove loyal. We accept confidential communications and then violate honor by repeating them. We receive favors and then return unkindness. We are helped over hard places and through difficulties, perhaps at great cost to our friends, and then forget.

We need to remind ourselves how much harder some of us make life for others by crosses we lay on them, whether in what we say or do, or in what we fail to say or do.

One of Mr. Lincoln's sayings was, "Die when I may, I want it said of me by those

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who know me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow." One of the most pathetic words of Charles Lamb's is a wish he uttered, as he thought of the way he had so often laid a cross on his mother's heart—"What would I not give," he said, "to call my mother back to earth for one day, to ask her pardon, on my knees, for all those acts by which I gave her gentle spirit pain!" Every one has a cross of his own to carry, but ours should never be the hand that shapes the load that shall weigh down another life.

Then there are crosses that God gives us to bear. Jesus spoke of his cross as a cup which the Father had put into his hand. Into every life come experiences clearly sent by God. The human and divine are so mingled in many of the events of our days that we cannot tell where the human ends and the divine begins. We need not try, however, to separate the threads, for God uses human events, even men's sins, in working out his purposes. Yet there are crosses which God lays upon

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us. When death comes into your home and one you love more than life lies still and silent among the flowers, you say God did it. There are many events in our lives for which we can find no human cause. There is immeasurable comfort, however, in the truth that this is God's world and that nothing ever gets out of our Father's hand. We need never be afraid of the crosses God lays upon us.

The cross of Jesus was terrible in its torture, but we know what came of it. It was his way to his glory and the way of redemption for the world. What was true in such an infinite way of the cross of the Son of God, is true in lesser way, but no less truly of every cross that God lays on any of his children. The beautiful legend tells us that the crown of thorns, when found, lay through Passion Week in all its cruel aspect, but Easter morning appeared changed, every thorn a glorious rose. The legend is true in a spiritual sense of any crown of thorns our Father permits us to wear. They will blossom into garlands of flowers on our head. That is the way

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with all the painful things which God sends into our lives—in the end they will be transformed. We need never be afraid of God's crosses.

Jesus bids us take up our cross, whatever it is, and follow him. No matter how the cross comes to be ours, if only it is a real cross, we are to lift it and bear it. We must not drag it, but take it up. That means that we are to accept it cheerfully. Jesus endured his cross and its shame with joy. He sang a hymn of praise as he left the upper room. The world never saw such a cross as his. It was like a dark mountain as it rested down upon him, but he faltered not as he took it up. We are to take up our crosses in the same glad, cheerful spirit.

We are bidden to take up our cross daily. There are some of Christ's friends who have to carry their cross day after day through years. It is never lifted off. "Let him take up his cross daily." There will come no days when we can lay it down and get a little rest from its weight. A young woman who was

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lamed by the carelessness of another was told the other day that she cannot hope ever to be cured, that she must always be a sufferer, must always be a cripple. It is not easy to accept such a burden and to be cheerful under it. But that is the cross which in some form or other many have to take up daily.

One comfort in such an experience is that our cross has to be carried only one day at a time. It is a fine secret to be able to live by the day. When we think of a lifelong cross that we have to carry till we die, the burden seems unendurable. But we can bear any pain or suffering for a day.

“ And so
God lays a little on us every day,
And never, I believe, on all the way,
Will burdens bear so deep
Or pathways lie so steep,
But we can go, if by God’s power
We only bear the burden of the hour.”

Some one says, “ I could bear my cross with joy if it was one that God gave to me. But

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my cross is not from God. Human hands put it on me. Human hands make it a daily cross of injustice, unfairness, wrong, cruel suffering." No doubt it is a hundred times harder to bear such a cross made for us by human hatred or brutality than it is to take up a cross of pain or sorrow or loneliness which comes from our heavenly Father. There is a sacredness about something that God gives us which makes it easier for us to accept it. We know there is love in it. But, however our cross may come to us, whether directly from God, through some providence, or indirectly, through some human unkindness, the Master's bidding is that we take it up daily and continue following him. It is our cross whether God or man lays it on our shoulder.

The cross which Jesus bore was made by human hands. Men persecuted him, men wove the crown of thorns for his head, men nailed his hands to the wood. Did he resist his cross because human cruelty made it for him? No; he accepted it without a murmur, without a word of resentment. He kept love in his heart

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through all the terrible hours. That is the way he would have us take up our cross, whatever it may be—never bitterly or resentfully, never sullenly or despairingly.

Jesus did not talk about his cross, and he would have us bear ours silently. Some people seem to want to carry their cross so that every one will see it. But that is not the way the Master would have us do. His voice was not heard in the street. He made no complaint, no outcry. He never called attention to his suffering. He is pleased with silent cross-bearing in his friends. He wants them to rejoice, even in pain. We should not take up our cross vaingloriously.

There is blessing in our cross, first, for ourselves, and then for others. Christ's cross lifted him to glory. Our crosses will also lift us to higher things. If we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with him. Then our crosses are meant also to be blessings to others. A writer has a strange fancy of a woman who carried a sword in her heart. She kept it concealed under her garments and

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went bravely on with her work. One day she met a blind woman who was groping along, with no staff to support her, and she gave the woman her sword. "Oh, this is a good staff," said the blind woman: "now I shall get on well." The woman looked, and lo! her sword had become a staff indeed in the blind woman's hand. The cross of Jesus was to him a cruel and terrible instrument of torture, a sword piercing through his heart. Now to men and women everywhere it is a staff to lean on, a guiding hand to lead them, a shelter from the storm, a refuge from the heat. We may so bear our crosses that they shall become blessings to all about us. A good woman was telling how a great grief which it seemed she could not possibly endure had enabled her to be a comforter of those in sorrow, through her sympathy with them, and that in giving love and help, her own burden had been lightened, her sorrow turned to joy.

Thus it is, that the crosses we take up obediently and cheerfully, and bear in faith and

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love, become wings to lift us and then benedictions to those to whom we minister. The cross of Christ is saving the world. Just so far as we take up our cross in the spirit of our Master will we become blessings to the world. Selfishness never made any spot holier or any life better. Accept your cross, take it up and bear it victoriously and there will be a new song in your own heart and you will start songs in the hearts of many others.

Power of Christ's Friendship

*A friend's bosom
Is as the inmost cave of our own mind,
Where we sit shut from the wide gaze of day,
And from the all-communicating air.*

—SHELLEY.

*O friend, my bosom said,
Through thee alone the sky is arched,
Through thee the rose is red,
All things through thee take nobler form
And look beyond the earth;
The mill-round of our fate appears
A sun-path in thy worth.
Me too thy nobleness has taught
To master my despair:
The fountains of my hidden life
Are through thy friendship fair.*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Power of Christ's Friendship



PERHAPS we are paying too dearly for some of the boasted gains of our modern life. They tell us that in an ordinary lifetime a man really lives longer now than Methusaleh did in his nearly ten centuries of antediluvian time. But in our swift, intense life we are losing some things that people used to enjoy in their more leisurely days. Friendship is one of these. There is no time for it now, for friendship takes time. We touch each other only lightly and superficially in our crowded days. We have many acquaintances, and we may give and receive help and inspiration even in our hurried contacts. But in quieter, slower days, the people had time to live together, and enter into intimate relations in which they impressed each other's life and did much in

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shaping and coloring each other's character. The art of friendship is one we cannot afford to lose. Friendship means a great deal to us, not only as a source of pleasure and happiness, but in practical ways. We never can know what we owe to our friends, what they have done for us, how they have helped us, what they have done in the building of our character. Our lives are like buildings going up, and every one who comes to us, whether for a prolonged stay or only for a few moments, puts something into the walls or into the adornment. Our friends, if they are worthy, exert a measureless influence over us. One writes:

*“‘He is my friend,’ I said—
‘Be patient.’ Overhead
The skies were drear and dim,
And lo! the thought of him
Smiled on my heart—and then
The sun shone out again.*

*“‘He is my friend!’ The words
Brought summer and the birds;*

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*And all my winter-time
Thawed into running rhyme
And rippled into song,
Warm, tender, brave, and strong."*

The thought that one who is noble, true, and worthy is our friend gives us a sense of companionship, even in loneliness. Such a consciousness is like a holy presence in which we cannot do anything unworthy. Such a friendship transforms us, enriches our character, sweetens our spirit, and inspires in us all upward aspirations and reachings.

The thought of these influences and ministrations of human friendship helps us to understand a little better what the friendship of Christ may be to us, and what it may do for us and in us. For one of the ways in which Christ offers himself to us is as our Friend. Perhaps we do not think enough of this phase of his life. We speak of him as our Saviour, our Master, our Helper, but do we think of him often enough as our Friend? Friendship implies intimacy. We love to be with a friend. We love to talk with him about

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all the sacred things of our life. Do we have any such intimacy with Christ?

The other day one complained that he could scarcely get time any more to pray, he had so much to do. Life is indeed strenuous for many of us, full of duties which seem to forbid leisure. If our modern life is robbing us of the privileges of human friendship, is there not danger that it shall make close, intimate friendship with our Master also almost impossible? We read of some one spending a whole hour every morning with Christ, and we say, "That is impossible in my crowded life." But even if we can get no long hours alone with our Master, we can cultivate a friendship with him that will go on unbroken through the longest, busiest hours. Those who were close to the great Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier, said that in the time of his most intense occupation he would often be heard saying in whispers, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" He lived all the time with his Master.

That is not an impossible attainment for any

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sincere and earnest Christian. We cannot always be on our knees in the formal attitude of prayer. We have our duties and we may not neglect them even for acts of devotion. This would not please our Master. We can conceive of occasions when prayer would not be the duty, when we ought even to leave our altar and attend to some service of love that needs us. But we may always pray while we work. Our hearts may be in communion with God even when our hands are busiest in activities. We may talk with Christ while we are serving him. In whatsoever we do we may have Christ with us and we may do all we do in his name. We do not have to leave our tasks in order to be with Christ. We may cultivate friendship with him in our busiest days.

If we would find the best that is in Christ, we must know him as a personal Friend. We are in danger of thinking that nothing counts in the Christian life but the activities; we must always be doing something, talking to somebody, holding meetings, making gar-

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ments for the poor, relieving distress. But there is a better way. The disciples thought Mary had wasted her ointment when she had broken the vase and poured the precious nard on her Master's head and feet. It had not done anybody any good. It had fed no hungry one, paid no one's rent, put bread in no hungry mouth, clothed no shivering child. They thought that using it only to honor a friend was a waste. But the truth is, that never before nor since, in the history of the world, was so much value put to more blessed use. Think how Mary's loving deed comforted the Master, warmed his heart and strengthened him for going to the cross. Then think how the telling of the story of her love has filled the world with sweet inspirations and gentle influences through all these centuries. Countless thousands have received impulses to lovely things through the story of Mary's deed of affection. Thus the fragrant act of this quiet woman has started inspirations of love wherever the story has been told throughout the world.

Power of Christ's Friendship

Of course it is worth while to build churches, found hospitals, and help the poor, but it is worth while also to cultivate friendship with Christ. The Chinese have a saying, "If you have two loaves of bread, sell one and buy a lily." Some people toil only for loaves, never thinking of lilies. But bread is not all that people need. There are days when you are not hungry for food, but are longing for sympathy, for a word of kindness, for encouragement, for appreciation, for friendship. There are hours when you have everything you could crave of earthly comfort and blessing and of human affection and interest, but need the touch of the hand of Christ, some revealing of divine interest and affection. Sell a loaf and buy a lily, for the lily will mean more to you than the bread. Of all the blessings within your reach nothing will mean so much to you as the friendship of Christ. If you have it you will not miss anything else that you do not have. This friendship, close, constant, confidential, satisfying, will leave nothing else to be desired.

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Think, too, what the friendship of Christ will do for us in the way of spiritual culture. It was the friendship of Jesus that was the chief influence in the making of St. John. He was not always the apostle of love that we know in the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles. These were written when John was an old man. At first he was hasty in temper and speech, resentful, ambitious for place, not sweet and loving. But he accepted the friendship of Christ, allowing its holy blessedness to pour into his heart like sunshine. And it transformed him.

It is related that a friend once said to Lord Tennyson, "Tell me what Jesus Christ is to you, personally." They were walking in the garden, and close by was a rosebush full of wonderful roses. Pointing to this miracle of nature, Lord Tennyson answered, "What the sun is to this rosebush, Jesus Christ is to me." The sun had wooed out from the bare, briery bush of the spring days all that marvelous beauty of roses. And whatever was lovely, winsome, and divine in the life of the

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great poet, he meant to say had been wooed out of his natural self by the warmth of Christ's love. So the John we know in later years was the St. John that the friendship of Christ had made. St. Paul tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. These are the roses that grow on the thorny stem of human nature when the warmth of the love of Christ has been falling upon it.

Then the friendship of Christ makes our Christian work a thousand times more beautiful. Love has a strange power in calling out the best that is in us. They discovered the reason for the young soldier's splendid courage in the battle, after he had fallen, in the picture of a fair face that he carried in his blouse pocket, over his heart. Love inspired his bravery. If the secrets of life were all known, it would be seen that the world's best work in every field is done through love's inspiration.

And the mightiest of all inspirations is the

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love of Christ. There is a legend of a monk in a monastery cell, who painted picture after picture of martyrs, saints, and oftener than aught else, of the thorn-crowned face of Christ. His fellow-monks thought him mentally wanting, and said his pictures were mere daubs. But he endured their jeers, and worked on. He had dreamed over the Christ of Calvary until his soul was aflame with loving devotion, and he longed to make a picture which would honor his Lord. One night, when the scorn of his companions had been almost more than he could bear, he sought his cell with a breaking heart. "My life is wasted," he cried. "I never can worthily paint my Beloved Master. To-morrow, the fire shall consume all these wretched failures." He raised his streaming eyes, and lo, there was Another in his cell—One thorn-crowned, his face shining in ineffable beauty, the very face he had seen so often in his dreams, and longed to paint! Then a voice spoke, "All work is worthy that is done for love of me." As he looked in wondering awe, his pictures

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on the wall took on a transcendent loveliness. The dreams of the poor monk's heart had found their realization.

Thus it is that the love of Christ transfigures the poorest, plainest things we do. We may be discouraged over the things we have been trying to do for Christ. A young Sunday-school teacher spoke with disheartenment of what seemed to her a failure in her efforts to do her pupils good. We all feel so of ourselves and our work. We cannot think that God will use anything so poor, so inadequate, so unworthy, as even our best. But let us remember that if the friendship of Christ is in our hearts, it is not we alone, but Christ and we, who do the work. Inspired by this friendship, even the smallest things we do if they are the best we can do, will be beautiful in heaven's sight and will be accepted.

Why Not Be Troubled?

*“Still on the lips of all we question,
The finger of God’s silence lies;
Will the lost hands in ours be folded?
Will the shut eyelids ever rise?
O friend, no proof beyond this yearning,
This outreach of our hearts, we need;
God will not mock the hope he giveth,
No love he prompts shall vainly plead.
Then let us stretch our hands in darkness,
And call our loved ones o’er and o’er;
Some day their arms will close about us,
And the old voices speak once more.”*

*“Thank God for friends your life has known,
For every dear, departed day;
The blessed past is safe alone—
God gives, but does not take away;
He only safely keeps above
For us the treasures that we love.”*

CHAPTER TWELVE

Why Not Be Troubled?



EXT to the little Twenty-third Psalm, the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel is, no doubt, the best known and best loved portion of the Bible.

It is a chapter of comfort. The sick love it, for there is a music in it which soothes pain and suffering. The dying love it, for it has its revealings of the life into which they are passing. The bereft love it, for it opens windows into heaven, and gives them glimpses of the blessed life of those who have gone to be at home in the Father's house.

Christ's friends were in great sorrow, sorrow which seemed inconsolable. Yet their Master's first word to them was, "Let not your heart be troubled." This seemed a strange word to say to them that night. How could they help being troubled in such experiences

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as theirs? Think of all Jesus had grown to be to them. For three years they had been members of his personal family, enjoying the most intimate relations with him. How much a friend can be to us in our life depends on the friend. If he has a rich nature, a noble personality, power to love deeply, capacity for friendship, the spirit of unselfish helpfulness; if he is able to inspire us to heroism and to worthy living; what he can be to us is simply immeasurable. Think of what the best, strongest, richest-hearted human friend is to you in the way of cheer, inspiration, guidance, courage, atmosphere. Think what Jesus with his marvelous personality must have been as a friend to his disciples. Then you can understand something of what his going from them meant to them.

Then he was more than a friend to them. They had believed in him as their Messiah, who was to redeem their nation and to lead them to honor and power. Great hopes rested in him. His death, as it seemed to them, would be the failure of all these hopes. The an-

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nouncement swept away, as they now thought, all that made life worth while to them. There are human friends whose death seems to leave only desolation in the hearts and lives of those who have loved them and leaned on them. But the death of Christ was to his personal friends and followers the blotting out of every star of hope and promise. Their sorrow was overwhelming. Yet Jesus looked into their faces and said, "Let not your heart be troubled." Jesus is always an encourager, a minister of cheer. Some people come to us in trial, thinking to comfort us, but their words fail to give any strength. They weep with us, they sympathize with us, but they do not make us any braver, any more able to endure. If we would be comforters like our Master, we must inspire others to endurance. We must bring them something that will make them stronger. Mere condolence will not do it. We must have something to give which will impart strength and courage.

What is there in the gospel of Christ that

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gives us authority to say, "Let not your heart be troubled"? The first thing Jesus bade his disciples do was to believe—"Believe in God, believe also in me." Thus far they had believed. Jesus had taught them a new name for God. They were to call him Father. He used almost no other name for God. The word "father" is a great treasure house of love-thoughts. It told the disciples of the minute thought and care of God, extending to the smallest events of their lives. It told them of goodness that never failed. It was a great lesson they had been learning—to think of God as their Father. In the shock of the last terrible days, however, there was danger that they would lose their faith. Yet Jesus said that dark hour: "Believe in God. Let nothing take away from you your faith in God as your Father." Then he said further, "Believe also in me." They had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. They believed that he had come to be the world's Redeemer. Now at the announcement that he was to die at the hands of his enemies,

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there was danger that they should lose their faith in him. If he died in defeat, what would become of his claim and their hope that he would redeem his people? To save them from their loss of faith, he exhorted them to continue to believe. "Believe in God, believe also in me."

We are always in danger of losing our faith in times of trouble. Many people are heard asking such questions as "How can God be a God of love, and suffer me to be so bereft, so stripped of good? Where now are the promises of blessing which are made so constantly in the Scriptures? Has God forgotten to be gracious?" To such questions the answer is, "Believe in God, believe also in me." Let nothing disturb your faith. Though it seems that love has failed, that God has forgotten you, that Christ is no longer your friend, still believe; believe in God, believe also in Jesus Christ.

Sorrow is full of mystery. Every way we turn we hear people ask, Why? "This is not love," we say. "This is not goodness. This

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is not divine care." We cannot understand. But how could we, with our narrow vision and our partial knowledge, understand the infinite purposes of God?

Then God does not want to give us an easy life—he wants to make something of us, and oftentimes the only way to do this is to give us pain, loss, or suffering. A writer tells of keeping for nearly a year the flask-shaped cocoon of an emperor moth. A narrow opening is left in the neck of the flask, through which the perfect insect slowly forces its way. The opening is so small that it seems impossible for the moth to pass through it. This writer watched the efforts of the imprisoned moth to escape. It did not appear to make any progress. At last he grew impatient. He pitied the little creature and resolved to assist it. Taking his scissors, he snipped the confining threads to make the struggle easier. In a moment the moth was free, dragging out a great swollen body and little shriveled wings. He watched to see the beauty unfold, but he watched in vain. It

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never was anything but a stunted abortion, crawling painfully about, instead of flying through the air on rainbow wings. Nature's way, God's way with moths, is the only true way, although it is a way of pain, struggle, suffering. Human pity may make it easier, but the end will be destruction.

Divine love never makes this mistake, either in nature or in dealing with human lives. God lets us suffer, for by suffering we will best grow into perfect beauty. When the mystery of pain or hardness comes into our life, let us not doubt. The disciples thought all their hopes had perished, but in the end they learned that every hope was fulfilled. Good came out of what seemed irretrievable disaster. "Believe in God, believe also in me," is always the word of faith and comfort. We cannot understand, but our Master understands, and that is enough.

Jesus told his disciples that he was going to his Father's house. The words give us a beautiful revealing of heaven. Heaven is home. On this earth there is no place so sweet, so sa-

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cred, so heart satisfying, as a true home. It is a place of love—truest, gentlest, most unselfish love. It is a place of confidence. We are always sure of home's loved ones. We do not have to be on our guard when we enter our home doors. We do not have to wear veils there, hiding or disguising our real selves. Home is a refuge to which we flee from the danger, the enmity, the unkindness, the injustice of the world. Home is the place where hungry hearts feed on love's bread. Mrs. Craik, in one of her books, has this fine picture:

“ Oh, conceive the happiness to know some one person dearer to you than your own self, some one breast into which you can pour every thought, every grief, every joy; one person, who, if all the rest of the world were to calumniate or forsake you, would never wrong you by a harsh thought or an unjust word; who would cling to you the closer in sickness, in poverty, in care; who would sacrifice all things to you, and for whom you

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would sacrifice all; from whom, except by death, night or day, you never can be divided; whose smile is ever at your hearth; who has no tears while you are well and happy and your love the same.”

This is a glimpse of what a true home is. The picture is sometimes realized on the earth—there are homes here which are well-nigh perfect. But it will be fully realized in heaven. No other description of heaven, given in the Bible, means so much to our hearts as that which our Master gives in these three words, “My Father’s house”—Home.

Jesus told his disciples further that he was going to prepare a place for them. He was going for their sakes. They thought they could not spare him, but he said he was going to continue his work on their behalf. Then he added, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you unto myself.” There was no accident therefore in the dying of Jesus. His going away was part of God’s plan and purpose for his life.

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The comfort for us in all our sorrows is that nothing has gone wrong, that God's purpose is going on even in what seems the wrecking of our human hopes. Your friend passed away the other night. You thought he would have been with you for many years to come. You had plans covering a long future of happiness. You were appalled when the doctor said that he could not live till morning. Life to you would be most dreary, lonely, empty, without this one who had become so dear to you. Is there any comfort for you in this experience? Christ says, "Let not your heart be troubled." There is no reason why you should be troubled. If you could see all things as God sees them, you would not be dismayed. If the disciples had known just what the death of their Master would mean—to him, to them, to the divine glory, to the world, they would not have been troubled. Death to your friend was the completion of the earthly portion of his life; the passing of the spirit to the heavenly home, to enter anew into the service of the Master. Is there

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no comfort in this? Is there no comfort in the truth of immortality, that he who liveth and believeth on Christ shall never die? Is there no comfort in knowing that your friend who has passed from the earthly home is in the Father's house?

We need not be anxious about the loved one we have sent out of our home into the Father's house. The baby is safer there than ever it could have been in the human mother's arms.

*“ Another lamb, O Lamb of God, behold
Within this quiet fold,
Among thy Father's sheep
I lay to sleep!
A heart that never for a night did rest
Beyond its mother's breast.
Lord, keep it close to thee,
Lest waking it should cry and pine for me!”*

You say, “ Yes, but my friend stayed so brief a time! I could almost wish that I had not let my heart fasten its tendrils about him, since so soon he was torn away from me.” Say it not. It is worth while to love, and

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to let the heart pour out all its sweetness in loving, though it be but for a day, and then to have the bliss give way to grief. Richard Watson Gilder in a little poem touches this element of human grief.

*Because the rose must fade
Shall I not love the rose?
Because the summer shade
Passes when winter blows,
Shall I not rest me there
In the cool air?*

*Because the sunset sky
Makes music in my soul,
Only to fail and die,
Shall I not take the whole
Of beauty that it gives
While yet it lives?*

It is sweet to have your friend, if only for one day. You will really have him always after that. For two persons to love each other at all, actually, deeply, worthily, is to have their lives knit together into one, indissoluble, two souls blent in one, inseparable.

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Death will not tear them apart. It is blessed to love, though we stay together but the briefest while. A baby comes and looks into the young mother's eyes, and in an hour is gone. Was that brief stay in vain? No; the mother always has a baby after that. The love for that sweet life will never die in her heart. She will always have on her soul the impression made by that short stay. Then in the eternal years she will have the beautiful life as her own, in love, fellowship, and joy.



The Problem of Temptation

*“If life is always a warfare
Between the right and the wrong,
And good is fighting with evil
For ages and æons long,—*

*“Fighting with eager cohorts,
With banners pierced and torn,
Shining with sudden splendor,
Wet with the dew of morn,—*

*“If all the forces of heaven
And all the forces of sin
Are met in the infinite struggle,
The souls of the world to win,—*

*“If God’s is the awful battle
Where the darkling legions ride—
Hasten to sword and to saddle!
Lord, let me fight on thy side.”*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Problem of Temptation



THE petition in our Lord's Prayer regarding temptation perplexes some good people. It reads in the Revised Version, "Bring us not into temptation."

Does God then ever bring us into temptation? Does he want us to be tempted? We think of temptation as incitement or persuasion to sin. We know that God never tempts us in this way. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." But the word temptation means also trial, testing. So we have this in St. James, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life." In the same epistle we have also this: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proving of your faith

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worketh patience." The reference here is to trials, disciplines, sufferings, rather than to incitements to sin. We are to be glad when we have such experiences, because in them we shall grow strong. It is a real misfortune never to have anything to put our character to the test or to bring out its undeveloped qualities.

Thus we are helped to understand the meaning of temptation from the divine side. When Jesus was led, driven, by the Holy Spirit into the waste places to be tempted of the devil, God's thought was not to cause him to sin; rather, it was to give him the opportunity to be tested and proved, that he might come again with the light of victory on his face, ready to be the Friend, Helper, and Deliverer of countless other men. So when God brings us into a place in which we must meet temptation, it is never his purpose to lead us to sin. That is Satan's purpose, but God's is that we may meet the temptation and be victorious in it. Temptations, therefore, are opportunities that God puts

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within our reach by which we are to become strong and rich in experience.

We are not, therefore, to pray that we shall never have any temptations. Imagine a soldier praying that he may never have to fight any battles. What is the business of a soldier but to fight? Only on battlefields can he learn courage or train himself to be a soldier. What battles are to a soldier, temptations are to a Christian. He never can become of much worth as a man if he never faces struggles and learns to overcome. Browning puts it thus :

*When the fight begins, within himself
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his
head,
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—
. . . . The soul waits and grows.*

Soldiers are made on battlefields, character is grown, men are made, in trial. Browning says again :

*Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his feet,*

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*And so be pedestalled in triumph? Pray
"Lead us into no such temptations, Lord."
Yea, but, O thou whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the hand and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise.*

God does then bring us into temptation. At least, he suffers us to meet temptation, not that we may fall, but that we may have the struggle and come out of it stronger, ready for nobler and worthier life and service. The Master's cheering word to every follower of his as he enters any struggle is, "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne." The day of temptation is doomsday to every struggler. They show you a place on the great mountain divide in the west, where the destiny of a dewdrop, trembling on a leaf, is decided by the direction of the breeze that is blowing. If the wind is from the west, the dewdrop will fall to the eastward of an invisible line and will be carried into the Mississippi, and to the Atlantic Ocean. But if there is even the gentlest

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breeze from the east, the drop of dew will fall to the west of the divide, and will start on its way to the Pacific. So in experiences of temptation, human lives tremble on the divide of the eternities. We know not the momentousness of our decisions even in what seem most trivial matters.

We understand now the meaning of temptation and the importance of its issue. It is the part of true life to make it a blessing. Some tell us that the petition in the Lord's Prayer is cowardly—"Bring us not into temptation." If nobler character lies beyond the struggle, why should we shrink from the struggle? Why not seek it and welcome it? Yet we dare not rush recklessly into peril. Our Master never bids us put ourselves needlessly in the way of danger. We are to ask for guidance and then go where he wants us to go, not thinking of the peril. Christ did not pray that his disciples should be taken out of the world, that is, away from its enmity and danger; his prayer rather was that they should never fail in any duty and should then

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be protected from the world's evil, that is, from sin; that in their battles and struggles they should be kept unspotted.

The prayer, "Bring us not into temptation," is never to be a request to be spared perilous duty, or that temptation, coming in the path of duty, shall be avoided. We should never be afraid of anything in the divine will. George Macdonald describes thus what he calls a sane, wholesome, practical working faith: "First, that it is a man's business to do the will of God; second, that God takes on himself the special care of that man; and third, that therefore that man ought never to be afraid of anything." If you go into any way of temptation or danger unaided, unaided of God, you go without God's protection and have no promise of shelter or deliverance. But if, after your morning prayer, "Bring us not into temptation to-day," you find yourself facing the fiercest struggle, you need have no fear. Christ is with you, and no harm can touch you.

The problem of Christian living then is not

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to escape struggle, to avoid meeting danger, but in any peril in the line of duty to be preserved from harm. Temptation is not sin. Sin begins when temptation is listened to, parleyed with, yielded to. There is no sin in the feeling of resentment or anger which rises in us when we are insulted, when injury is done to us. We cannot prevent the momentary feeling of wrong; that is not sin if we gain a victory over it, if we turn the rising bitter feeling into a prayer, and the impulse to resentment into a deed of kindness. But when the bitterness is allowed to nest in our heart we have sinned.

Safety in temptation requires that we solemnly and resolutely reject every impulse to do anything that is wrong. We must watch the merest beginnings of departure from right. We have our weak points and must keep a double guard at these places. We must watch our companionships. We would better sacrifice a friendship that has brought us much pleasure, rather than by retaining it suffer contamination or defiling. The in-

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fluence of the world is most subtle. It is easy to drift unconsciously into its atmosphere, and to have our lives hurt by its spirit.

In one of Maarten Maarten's novels, one of the characters is a pure-hearted girl who might be judged to have no consciousness of sin. She, however, leaves her quiet home, and with friends visits Paris and Monte Carlo. At the close of one day she receives a black-edged letter, telling her of the death of her old pastor. He had sent his love to her just before he died. The event recalls the good man's birthday message to her some time before, which she had overlooked. The message was, "Keep yourself unspotted from the world." The words now started from the page with painful vividness.

Then the book goes on to tell how the girl sat stroking the back of one hand with the other, mechanically, as if to wipe off the dim stains of the day. She felt soiled as well as saddened. She opened the window and looked up at the stars. Then her head sank on the window ledge and the tears fell freely on the

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blots that no tears could wipe away. She had not gone into the world's evil ways. She had not given up her Christ—only she had gone into the atmosphere of worldliness and her garments were no longer unspotted. The incident tells us how easy it is to be hurt by the world.

How may we get divine help in our struggles with temptation? Only the other day one was almost bitterly complaining of God because he had allowed a friend to fall into grievous sin after earnest prayer that the friend might be kept. "Why did God let my friend fall?" was the question that was asked, as if God had failed to do his part, as if it were God's fault that the friend had fallen. We must remember that God does not keep any one from sin by force. He does not build a wall round us, that the evil cannot get near us. He keeps us through our own will, our own choice. But he will always help us when we strive to be true.

There is a luminous word about temptation in one of St. Paul's epistles: "There hath no

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temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it." We never can plead that our temptation is too great for human strength. It is never necessary for us to fall. We may overcome in the most bitter struggle. God keeps watch, and will never permit the temptation to become greater than we are able to bear. He does not pamper us and keep us from struggle. He wants us to be good soldiers. He wants us to learn to stand and to be brave, true, and strong. But when he sees that the temptation is growing so hard that we cannot longer resist it, he comes with help. He makes a way of escape—opens some door by which we may have relief or deliverance. Peter was not kept from temptation the night of the Lord's betrayal—it was necessary that he should be tried and that his own strength might fail. In no other way could Peter be prepared for his work. But Jesus

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kept his eye on his disciple in his terrible experience and made intercession for him, that his faith might not utterly fail.

It is well that we learn the need of divine help in the temptations of our lives. It is not enough to have the forms of religion—in the great crises of our experience, only Christ himself will suffice. It is said that Gainsborough, the artist, longed also to be a musician. He bought musical instruments of many kinds and tried to play them. He once heard a great violinist bringing ravishing music from his instrument. Gainsborough was charmed and thrown into transports of admiration. He bought the violin on which the master had played so marvelously. He thought that if he only had the wonderful instrument he could play, too. But he soon learned that the music was not in the violin, but was in the master who played it.

We sometimes read how certain persons have learned to overcome in temptation and we try to get their method, thinking we can overcome, too, if we use the same formula

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that they use. We read the biographies of eminent saints to find out how they prayed, how they read the Bible, thinking that we can get the secret of their victoriousness simply by adopting their order of spiritual life. But as the music was not in the violin, but in the player, so the secret of victory in temptation is not in any method, not even in the Bible, nor in any liturgy of prayer, but only in Christ. The power that makes us strong is not in any religious schedule, it is not in any other one's methods—we must have Christ with us, Christ in us.

There is a beautiful legend of Columba, the apostle of Christianity in North Britain. The saint wished to make a copy of the Psalms for his own use, but the one book was kept out of his reach, hidden in the church. Columba made his way secretly into the church, at night, and found the place where the volume was kept. But there was no light in the building and he could not see to write. But when he opened the book and took his pen to write, light streamed out from his

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hand and flooded the page with radiance. With that shining hand he made a copy of the Psalter. It is only a legend, but it teaches that those who live always in communion with Christ have Christ in themselves and need falter at nothing. When we are serving him he helps us. The light of his life in us will make our lives shine so that where we go the darkness will be changed to day. Then we will always be conquerors in him.

Christ's Body and Its Members

*“Lord, give me grace
To take the lowest place:
Nor even desire,
Unless it be thy will, to go up higher.”*

*“Except by grace,
I fail of lowest place;
Except desire
Sit low it aims awry to go up higher.”*

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Christ's Body and Its Members



ST. PAUL speaks of the church as the body of Christ. He had his own body in his incarnation. Now his body is the whole great company of his people, all who love him, trust him, and are faithfully following him. Every believer is a member of this body and has some function to fill in it. St. Paul uses the human body and its members in a very effective way in illustration of important spiritual truth. "As the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ." "Ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof." "The body is not one member, but many." All that any Christian can be is one of the members of Christ's body. He is not everything. The hand is not the body. The

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eye is not the body. The lungs are not the body. The most that any believer can be is a hand, a foot, an eye, an ear.

Imagine the hand getting the thought that it is the whole body, ignoring all the other members, setting up for itself, and trying to get on independently. What could the hand do without the brain, without the lungs, without the heart? Or think of the brain asserting its independence, or claiming to be the body. Suppose that it really is the fountain of thought, and that in a way it directs all the movements of the body. Still, what can the brain do without the hand to carry out its plans, or the tongue, to speak the thoughts that are born in its mysterious folds? The same is true of each member of the body—it is nothing by itself; it is dependent on the other members; it can fulfill its functions only by accepting its place and trying to do its own little part. Alone, it is nothing, and can do nothing. “You have seen a hand cut off, or a foot, or a head, lying apart from the rest of the body. That

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is what the man becomes when he separates himself from others, or does anything to make himself unsocial." He is of use only in his own place. The same is true in the church. We are only individual members of the body of Christ, and we can fill our place only by doing what belongs to us as individual members. If we try to cut ourselves off from the body, and live independently, our life will be a failure.

Again, the whole work of the body can be done only by a diversity of gifts in the members. "If they were all one member, where were the body?" Suppose there was only an eye—no ear, no tongue, no hand, no foot; could the body exist? Every member of the body has its particular function, and no member is unnecessary. The health of the body can be preserved only by every member doing its own part. This is plain enough so far as the physical body is concerned. The same is true also of the body of Christ, the church. There are many members. There is need for wide diversity of gifts, else much of the work

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that the church is set to do would not be done. The foot is a useful member of the body, but the foot could not fulfill all the bodily functions. It cannot think, it cannot smell, it cannot see, it cannot hear. It is good to have eyes. Blindness is the sorest of all physical losses. But deafness is also a grievous affliction, and if you had good eyes and no ears, your life would be very incomplete. Your eye could not hear for you. Every member of the body has some use that no other member can supply.

So it is in the church. No one person can do everything that needs to be done. The fullest life is only a fragment. Jesus Christ had in his life all virtues and graces. He was a perfect man, not sinless only, but complete. The only other perfect and complete life is found in the other body of Christ, the church. That is, if it were possible to gather from all earth's redeemed lives, through the ages, the fragments of spiritual beauty and good in each, and combine them all in one life, that too would be found to be full and

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perfect. No one Christian can do everything that the church is required to do. One has one gift of usefulness and another another. There are a thousand different kinds of usefulness needed, and there must be a life for each.

Here we see the wisdom of variety and diversity in human gifts and capacities. It is said that no two human faces in the world are identical in every feature. So no two human lives are just the same, with the same ability, the same talents, the same power of usefulness. This almost infinite diversity in capacity is not accidental. The world has a like variety of needs, and hence the necessity for so many kinds of gifts. There must be a hand for every task, or not all the tasks could be performed, not all human needs could be met. Some things would have to remain untouched, some needs unmet.

The Master tells us that to each one is given his own particular work. It is no fancy to say that God has a plan for every life. He made you for something all your own. He

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thought about you before he made you, and had in his mind a particular place in his great plan which he made you specially to fill, and a piece of work in the vast world's scheme which he made you to do. That place no one but you can fill, for every other person has likewise his own place and work in the great divine plan. No one can do the work of any other. If you fail to do your particular duty, there will be a blank in the world's work, where there ought to have been something beautiful, something well done.

“To each one his work.” It may be only a little thing, but the completeness of the universe will be marred if it is not done, however small.

*“Each life that fails of its true intent
Mars the perfect plan that the Master meant.”*

The particular thing that God made us to do is always the thing we can do best, the only thing that we can do perfectly. We are not to suppose that this is always necessarily a large thing, something brilliant, something

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conspicuous. It may be something very small, something obscure. Indeed, the things which seem most commonplace may be most important in their place in the great plan of God, and may prove of greatest value to the world. Helen Keller writes suggestively on this subject: "I used to think that I should be thwarted in my desire to do something useful. But I have found that though the ways in which I can make myself useful are few, yet the work open to me is endless. The gladdest laborer in the vineyard may be a cripple. Darwin could work only half an hour at a time; yet in many diligent half hours he laid anew the foundations of philosophy. I long to accomplish a great and noble task; but it is my chief duty and joy to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. It is my service to think how I can best fulfill the demands that each day makes upon me, and to recognize that others can do what I cannot. Green, the historian, tells us that the world is moving along, not only by the mighty shoves of its

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heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker; and that thought alone suffices to guide me in this dark world and wide. I love the good that others do, for their activity is an assurance that whether I can help or not the true and the good will stand sure."

Every member of the body of Christ has something to do. Some members do great things, some only small things. Every Christian has a work all his own. It is not precisely the same as the work of any other, but it is his own, and he fills his place in the universe best when he does just that. Some one defined a gentleman as a man who has nothing to do. But that is not a true definition of God's gentleman. There is no Christian who has nothing to do. Each one is to find what his part is and then do it. Sometimes people attempt to do things they cannot do, leaving untouched, meanwhile, things they could do beautifully. If one has not been able to do what he has been trying to do, he is not to conclude that there is nothing

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for him—there is some other work which he can do, and which is waiting somewhere for his coming.

No one should ever despise another's work or his way of doing it. We dare not call any work lowly or insignificant. Besides, we really have nothing to do with any one's life's tasks but our own. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Some people in their confidence in their own way of doing things have no patience with the way other people do things. There is need for different methods, if we would reach the needs of people and do all kinds of necessary work. Let us judge no other man's way and no other man's work. St. Paul suggests also that the dull and less showy manner of some other people's way of working may be more effective than the brilliant way we do things. "Nay, much rather, those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble are necessary; and those parts of the body, which we think to be less hon-

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orable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor." For example, the brain, the heart, the lungs, and other organs which work out of sight may not get so much attention as the face, the eyes, the hands, and yet they are even more necessary than these. One may lose a hand, a foot, an eye, and still live and make much of his life. But when lungs or heart are destroyed, the life is ended.

There are showy Christians, active and valuable in their way, who might be lost to the church and yet their loss not be felt half so much as that of some of the lowly ones, who by their prayers and godly lives help to keep the church alive. We dare not look with contempt upon the lowliest person. We do not know who are dearest to God among all his children. It was a poor widow in the temple one day who won the highest commendation from him who looks upon the heart. There is no part of the body, however unseemly and unhonored, which is not essential, whose function, perhaps, is not of even greater importance than the showiest member. So it may be

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that the plain Christians whom some people laugh at are they to whom the church is indebted for the richest spiritual blessings it receives.

We may settle it, therefore, that every one has his own place and his own part in the body of the church. Some are to preach with eloquent tongue the gospel of Christ. Some who have not the gift of eloquence are to pray beside the altar. There is a story of a monk who spoke with power, and souls were melted. But he was told from heaven that " hearts were stirred, and saints were edified, and sinners won, by his, the poor lay brother's humble aid, who sat upon the pulpit stairs and prayed." If we cannot preach we can pray, and there may be more power in the praying than in the most eloquent preaching we could do.

Our little part is all we have to do in the Master's work, but we must make sure that we do that. To fail in the lowliest place is to leave a flaw in God's great plan. All duty is summed up in one—that we love one another.

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We are bound up in the bundle of life in most sacred associations with our fellow-men. Whenever, through willfulness or through neglect, we fail in any duty of love, we leave some one unhelped who needed just what we could have given him.

It will be pathetic for any redeemed one to come home with no fruit of service. A guest at the Hospice of St. Bernard in the Alps tells this incident of one of the noble St. Bernard dogs that have saved so many men. This dog came struggling home one morning through the snow, exhausted and faint, till he reached the kennel. There he was wildly welcomed by the dogs. But sad and crest-fallen, he held his head and tail to the floor, and crept away and lay down in a dark corner of the kennel. The monks explained that he was grieved and ashamed because he had found no one to rescue that morning from the storm-drifts. How shall we feel, we whom Christ has redeemed, if we come home at last, ourselves, without having brought any one with us?

Keserbe

*“Through love to light, O wonderful the way
That leads from darkness to the perfect day!
From darkness and from sorrow of the night,
To morning that comes singing o’er the sea.
Through love to light; through light, O God, to thee,
Who art the love of love; the eternal light of light.”*

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Reserve



NO onlooker could not have told in the early hours of the evening which were the wise virgins and which the foolish. It was not until midnight that the difference became apparent. Even then, for a moment, the ten virgins seemed all in the same plight. They all had been asleep, and when they were suddenly awakened the lamps of all were going out. The difference then appeared—five had no oil with which to refill their lamps; the other five had made provision in advance and were quickly ready to go out to meet the bridal procession.

Life is full of just such tragedies as occurred that midnight. Thousands of people in all lines of experience fail because they have neglected their preparation at the time when preparation was their one duty. The reserve of oil was the central feature in the prepara-

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tion of the wise virgins—that was what made them ready at midnight. The want of this reserve was the cause of the failure of the other five. The teaching is that we should always make even more preparation than what seems barely necessary. Our safety in life is in the reserve we have in store.

The other day a physician gave it as the reason of the death of one of his patients in typhoid fever, that the young man had no reserve of vitality, and could not make the fight. He had no oil in his vessel with his lamp. Reserve in character is also important. It is not enough that you shall be sufficiently strong to meet ordinary struggles or carry ordinary burdens. Any hour you may have to endure a struggle which will require extraordinary courage and power of endurance. If you are ready only for easy battling, you will then be defeated. To-morrow, you may have to lift a load many times heavier than you carry in your common experiences. If you have no reserve of strength you must sink under the extra burden.

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We must build our lives for emergencies, if we would make them secure. It is not enough for a soldier to be trained merely for dress parade. It requires no courage to appear well on the drill-ground ; it is the battle that tests the soldier's bravery and discipline. A writer tells of watching a ship captain during a voyage across the Atlantic. The first days were balmy, without more than a pleasant breeze. The passengers thought the captain had an easy time, and some of them said that it required little skill to take a great vessel over the sea. But the fourth day out a terrific storm arose, and the ship shivered and shuddered under the buffeting of the waves. The storm continued, and in the morning the captain was seen standing by the mainmast, where he had been all night, with his arms twisted in the ropes, watching the ship in the storm and directing it so as to meet the awful strain in the safest way. The reserve was coming out in the dauntless seaman. He had oil in his vessel with his lamp.

We see the same in life's common experiences.

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Here is a young man who seems to get on prosperously for a time. All things are easy for him. People prophesy hopefully for him. Then life stiffens and burdens increase. Complications arise in his affairs. He fails. He had no reserve, and he went down in the stress. On the other hand, there are men who move through life quietly and serenely in times of ordinary pressure, revealing no special strength, skill or genius. By and by they face a new order of things. Responsibility is increased, there are dangers, difficulties, struggles, and it does not seem that they can possibly weather the gale. But as the demands grow greater, the men grow larger, braver, wiser, stronger. Emergencies make men. No man ever reaches any very high standard of character until he is tried, tried sorely, and wins his way to the goal.

Young people ought to form their life and character not merely for easy things, for common experiences and achievements, but for emergencies. When they build a ship at

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Cramp's they do not make it strong enough merely to run down the Delaware; they do not compute their measurements of strength for the vessel with a view to a July passage over the sea, when there will probably not be any storms. They build it for the fiercest tempests it may ever have to encounter. That is the way young people ought to do with their lives. Just now, in their sweet homes, they do not have a care or an anxious thought. Everything is done for them. Flowers bloom all about them, love sweetens all the days. They hope to have the same sheltered life all their years, and they may never need to be strong. They may never have a struggle, nor know a want, nor have to face adversity, nor be called to fight hard battles for themselves. It is possible that no sudden midnight call may ever cause fear or consternation in their hearts. But they are not sure of this. Before them may lie sorest testings. At least they will repeat the folly of the foolish virgins, if in the days of education and training they prepare only for easy

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experiences, unburdened days, and do not build into their life sound principles, stanch character, indomitable courage, invincible strength, so as to be ready for the most serious possible future.

What is true of life in its equipment for success in other departments, is quite as true of religious preparation. It is not enough to be a good Christian on Sunday and in church. It is not enough to seek a religion that will keep us respectable, decorous and true in life's easy, untested ways. You may never have to meet temptations or be called to endure persecution for your faith. You may never have to take up the burdens of great responsibility. Your life may always be easy. But the chances are that you will come into times of trial. Therefore you must prepare yourself now so that whatever you may be called upon to meet hereafter, in the way of duty, struggle, endurance or testing of any kind, you may not fail. Build your ship for the roughest seas. Have your reserve of oil, so that if ever your lamps are going out you

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can refill them and keep the light shining through the darkest midnight hours.

Another lesson from our Lord's parable is that each must have his own lamp and must keep it filled with his own oil. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out." But they answered, "Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." Has it ever seemed to you that the wise ought to have granted the request of their sisters in their distress, sharing their oil with them? Some think they were unfeeling and cold in their refusal. But even on the ground of right and justice, the answer of the wise virgins was right. We are not required to fail in our own duty in order to help another to do his duty. But there is a deeper meaning which our Master would teach here—that the blessings of grace cannot be transferred. That which the oil represents cannot be given by any one to another. "Each one must bear his own burden." One cannot believe for another. One

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cannot transfer the results of one's faithfulness to another. If you have lived well through your years and have won honor by your good deeds, you cannot give any portion of that honor and good name to another who has lived foolishly, and begs you to share with him the fruits of your faithful life. If one woman has improved her opportunities and has grown into a strong, self-reliant, refined and disciplined character, while her sister with like opportunities, has been negligent and has developed a weak, uncultured and unbeautiful womanhood, the first cannot impart any of her strength, her self-control, her disciplined spirit to the other, to help her through some special emergency. If one man has studied diligently and mastered every lesson, at length reaching a position of eminence and power, of splendid manhood and character, he cannot give of his self-mastery, strength, and right living to his brother who has trifled through the days which were given for training and preparation. A brave soldier in the day of battle cannot share his

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courage with the trembling comrade by his side. The same is true of all qualities and attainments—they cannot be transferred.

So it is also in the receiving of grace. The holiest mother cannot share her holiness with her child who is defiled with sin. David would have died for his son Absalom, but he could not. We cannot take another's place in life. We cannot give another our burden ; it is ours and is not transferable. In temptation one who is victorious cannot give part of his victory or part of his strength to the friend by his side, who is about to fall.

There is no more solemn truth concerning life than this, of the individuality of each person. Each one stands alone before God in his unsharable responsibility and accountability. No one of us can lean on another in the day of stress and terror and say, "Help me!" We may want to help others. We ought to want to help others. We are not Christians if we do not have in our hearts a passion for helpfulness. But there are limits to helpfulness. There are things we cannot do for

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others, even for those nearest to us. A mother cannot bear her child's pain for it. A father cannot help his boy to be a man, save through persuasion and influence—he cannot make his boy good and noble. Then when his son comes to him in great spiritual need, he cannot give him divine grace. The wise virgins were right when they said, "We cannot give you of our oil."

When we come to our times of sorrow and need, we cannot then get from our friends the help we will require. If you would be brave and soldierly in life's struggles and dangers you must acquire your courage and soldierliness now for yourself, in the days of training and discipline. Too many young people do not realize what golden opportunities come to them in their school days. They make little of the privileges they enjoy. Sometimes they call them anything but privileges. They think school life wearisome. They waste the days and shirk the lessons. Then by and by the school door closes—shuts upon them. Now they must face life with its responsibil-

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ities and they are not ready for it. Through all their years they may move with limping step, with dwarfed life, with powers undisciplined, unable to accept the higher places that would have been offered to them if they had been ready for them. They fail in their duties and responsibilities—all because they wasted their school days. Napoleon once said to a boys' school, "Remember that every hour wasted at school means a chance of misfortune in future life." Never were truer words spoken, and their application reaches through all life.

"They that were ready went in." That is always true of blessings, of privileges, of honors. They that are ready go in; no others do. Young men must be ready for life's places if they would enter into them when they offer themselves. The unready are barred out—and they are countless. Make yourself ready for life's best places and you will be wanted for them in due time. There is no such thing as chance. Men get only what they are ready for. Many young men depend upon influence

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—they think friends can put them into good places. Friends have their use and do what they can. But no friend, no favoritism, no influence can make a man ready for a place. That is his own matter. There are no good places for incompetency. The bane of life everywhere is unreadiness. Don't be a smatterer. If you are going into business begin at the bottom and patiently master every detail, no matter how long it may take or how much it may cost you. If you are a student, miss no lesson, for the one lesson missed to-day may be the key, ten, twenty years hence to open the door to a place of honor, and you cannot go in if you do not have the key.

A Programme for a Day

*“To-day is mine: I hold it fast,
Hold it and use it as I may,
Unmindful of the shadow cast
By that dim thing called Yesterday.*

*“To-morrow hovers just before,
A bright-winged shape, and lures me on,
Till in my zeal to grasp and know her,
I drop To-day—and she is gone.*

*“The bright wings captured lose their light;
To-morrow weeps and seems to say,
‘I am To-day—ah, hold me tight!
Ere long I shall be Yesterday.’”*

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A Programme for a Day



WE ought to make our days symphonies. Some one says, "There is no day born but comes like a stroke of music into the world, and sings itself all the way through." That is God's thought for each one of our days. He would not have us mar the music by any discords of our own. He wants us to live sweetly all the day—without discontent, without insubmission, without complaining, without unlovingness or uncharitableness. Each one of us is playing in God's orchestra, or singing in God's choir, and we ought not to strike a wrong chord or sing a discordant note all the day. We need the divine blessing in the morning to start the music in our hearts. It is always a pitiful mistake to begin any day without heaven's benediction.

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The programme for the day should always open with prayer. In one of the Hebrew Psalms we have a suggestion of the way we should begin each morning. The first petition of this old liturgy is, "Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning." This is a prayer that the first voice to break upon our ears at the opening of the day shall be the voice of God. It is also a request that the first voice we hear in the morning shall be a cheerful one, a voice of hope, of joy, of loving-kindness.

It is sad when the first sounds a child hears when wakening in the morning are sounds of anger, ill-temper, blame, complaining. A gentle-hearted mother takes pains that her child never shall be frightened or shocked by harsh or bitter words. She seeks to keep the atmosphere of her home, her baby's growing place, sweet and genial. It is a great thing when the voice of God's loving-kindness falls upon our ears the first of all voices when we wake. It makes us stronger for the day to have God's "Good morning" as our earliest

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greeting. It starts our thoughts in right channels to open our Bible and hear God's word of command and Christ's "Peace be unto you," before any news of the day, or any earthly calls or greetings break upon our ears. If the first thoughts of the morning are cheerful, heartening, encouraging, the day is brighter, sweeter, to its close.

It will be a great thing for us if we will take a new thought from God each morning and let it be our guide, and inspire us for the day. We may be allowing our minds to run in unwholesome ways—ways of discontent, of envy, of meanness, of forgetfulness, of selfishness in some form or other. We travel in these tracks persistently. If we are ever going to reach a beautiful and joyous Christian life, we must have these thought tracks vacated, fenced across, abandoned. The way to do this is to listen to God's voice every morning, as we read his word and let it start our minds in new and better paths.

The next item in this programme for a day is the seeking of divine guidance. "Cause

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me to know the way wherein I should walk." We cannot find the way ourselves. The path across one little day seems a very short one, but short as it is it is tangled and obscure, and we cannot find it ourselves. An impenetrable mist covers the field of the sunniest day, as well as that of a moonless and starless night. When clouds are hanging over you, you ask guidance. You pray when you are in trouble, but in happy times and when all things are going well with you, it does not seem to you that you need help and guidance. Yet you really know no more of the way through the bright days than through the dark nights. When one is walking in a forest and sees a little path turn away from the main road, he does not know whither that path will take him if he follows it. So we know not what the plan we are considering, the business venture we are entering upon, the friendship we are just forming, will mean to us in the next ten, twenty, fifty years. We need divine guidance every inch of the way. Our steps, unguided, though now start-

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ing among flowers may lead us into bogs, thorns, and darkness. We need every morning to pray this prayer, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk."

Then God will always find some way to direct us. He guides us by his word. He guides us through our conscience. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." He guides us also through the counsel and influence of human friends. He guides us by his providence. Sometimes this guidance is very strange. One said the other day, in great distress, "A year ago I was in trouble and I prayed to God most earnestly to help me. Instead of this he has let the trouble grow worse through all the year." But God is not yet through answering this prayer: His guidance has not reached its conclusion. This deepening of the mystery, this increasing of the pain, this extending of the trouble—have you thought that that is part of God's way of answering your prayer and helping you?

If Joseph, the morning he left home to go to find his brothers, prayed, "Cause me to

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know the way wherein I should walk to-day," he would have wondered, on his way to Egypt as a captive, whether that was really the answer to his morning prayer. It certainly did not seem that it could be. He would probably have wondered why God had not heard his request. But as years went on, Joseph learned that there had been no mistake in that guidance. If he had escaped from the caravan on the way he would only have spoiled one of God's thoughts of love for him. When we pray in the morning that God will show us the way, we may take the guidance with implicit confidence.

Another item in this programme for a day is defence. "Deliver me, O Jehovah, from mine enemies; I flee to thee to hide me." The day is full of dangers. We do not know it. We see no danger. We go out, not dreaming of any possible peril. All seems fair and safe, yet everywhere there are enemies and dangers. How can we be sure of protection? We can commit our lives into the care of God. We have no promise that prayer will remove

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the dangers out of the path—that is not the way God usually makes our days safe for us. Prayer brings divine blessing down into our lives, so that we shall not be hurt by enemies. The problem of Christian life is not to get an easy way, but to pass over the hardest way and through its worst perils, unhurt. To omit prayer is to face the world's dangers unprotected. To pray, is to commit ourselves to the keeping of Almighty God.

The next item of this programme for a day is the acceptance of God's plan for our life. "Teach me to do thy will." No truth means more if it is properly understood than that God thought about us before we were born, and had a distinct divine purpose in our creation. We read of John the Baptist, that he was a man sent from God. His mission in the world was down among God's long plans, part of the Messianic prophecy. But John was not exceptional among men in this regard. Our life and work may not be as important as his, but God had a plan for us too before we were born. Each one of us was

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made to attain a certain character, to fill a certain place and to do certain work. The noblest use we can make of our life is to fill out God's plan for us. If we fail in this, no matter how great we may seem to be, we are not so great as we would have been if we had fulfilled God's thought for us. Browning, who puts so many great Scriptural truths so forcefully, writes:

*Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
The heavens, God thought on me, his child;
Ordained a life for me, arranged
Its circumstances every one
To the minutest.*

Our morning prayer is, "Teach me to do thy will." If God has a plan for our life he will not hide it from us so that we cannot learn what it is. Nor would he have a will for us, for the doing of which he holds us responsible, if it were impossible for us to do that will. How then does he make his will known to us? It is the work of all life. We chafe at

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sorrow, but in sorrow God is leading us to accept his way. We murmur when we have to suffer, but pain is God's school in which he teaches us the lessons we cannot learn in any other way. We begin at the foot of the class and patiently pass upward, not easily, oftentimes painfully. A good woman who has had a long experience of trouble said that she was losing her faith in God. "If God is my Father," she said, "why has he permitted me to suffer so at the hands of one who had sworn to love, honor and cherish me till death?" Her question cannot be answered. We may not presume to give God's reasons for allowing his child to endure such wrong year after year. But we may say with confidence, that in all our experiences of pain and suffering, of loss and disappointment, of sickness and privation, the Master is teaching us to do his will. We should never lose faith. We should keep love and trust in our hearts, whatever may come.

The last item in the programme for a day is a prayer for help. "Quicken me, O Jehovah,

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for thy name's sake." To quicken is to give new life, to strengthen. That is just what we need if we would learn to be beautiful in our Christian life. This is also just what God has promised to do for us. He knows our weakness and would give us strength. The tasks he sets for us, he would help us to do. He wishes us to attain loveliness of disposition until his own sweetness of spirit is ours, and he will help us to attain it. The beauty we long to have in our life he will help us to fashion. He will take even our failures and make them into realizations, for the things we try, with love for Christ to do and cannot, he will work out for us. When we have done our best, and nothing seems to come of our effort, and we sit penitent and weary beside our work, he will come and finish it himself. What we really try to do is what he sees in our life and work. Our intentions, though we seem unable to carry them out, he will fulfill. Let us not be afraid. We have a most gentle and patient teacher. If only we sincerely try to do his will and learn the lessons he sets for

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us, he will bring us through at last to our graduation with honor.

*"I asked for strength; for with the noontide heat
I fainted, while the reapers, singing sweet,
Went forward with ripe sheaves I could not
bear.*

*Then came the Master, with his blood-stained
feet,*

And lifted me with sympathetic care.

Then on his arm I leaned till all was done,

And I stood with the rest, at set of sun,

My task complete."

Let Us Love One Another

*“There is the sweetness of the rose,
The subtle charm of perfume rare,
Which borne on every breeze that blows
Can fill with fragrance all the air.*

*“There is the sweetness of the song
That trills from woodland warbler’s throat,
Which happy memory can prolong,
Recalling every liquid note.*

*“But sweeter far than bloom or bird
Though well the senses they beguile,
Than aught by nature e’er conferred,
Is still the sweetness of a smile.”*

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Let Us Love One Another



PEOPLE are beginning to understand that there is only one lesson in life to learn—to love. This was St. John's lesson. Tradition says that when they carried him for the last time into the church, he lifted up his feeble hands and said to the listening congregation, "Little children, love one another." The words are echoing yet throughout the world. This is the lesson we all need to learn.

The place to begin practicing this lesson is at home. Some one tells about a bird that had two voices. When it was out among other birds its voice was sweet. It sang only cheerful, happy songs then, without ever a harsh note. The birds all thought it was one of the sweetest singers they had ever heard. But when that same bird went back to its own

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nest, its voice instantly lost its sweetness and became rough, rasping, croaking, and fretful. Perhaps being out all day, singing sweet songs everywhere, made the poor bird so tired in the evening when it got home that it could not be sweet any longer. But really if a little bird cannot be sweet both in its own nest, among its dear ones, and out among neighbors and strangers, would it not better be sweet at home anyway?

It is said that there are some people who, like this strange bird, have two voices. When they are away from home they are models of amiability. They are so polite and courteous that everybody admires them and loves them. They are most gentle and kind to every one. They are always doing favors. They will go all lengths to show a kindness. They are always happy, cheerful, patient and are ever encouragers of others. They are always saying appreciative things. They see the best in their friends and neighbors and praise it, not seeing faults, certainly never exposing them or reproving them. But it is said that when

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these people get back home and are alone with their own families, this sweet, gracious voice at once changes, becomes dull, harsh, severe, sometimes petulant, impatient, even angry.

Is it not too bad?

It has been remarked by a careful-observer that almost any one can be courteous, patient, and forbearing in a neighbor's house. "If anything goes wrong, or is out of tune, or disagreeable there, it is made the best of, not the worst. Efforts are made even to excuse it, and to show that it is not any one's fault; or if it is manifestly somebody's fault, it is attributed to accident, not design. All this is not only easy but natural in the house of a friend."

Will any one say that what is easy and natural in the house of another is impossible in one's own home? It certainly is possible to have just as sweet courtesy, just as unvarying kindness, just as earnest efforts to please, just as tender care not to hurt or give pain, in the inner life of our own homes as it is in

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outside social relations. That is a part of what St. John means when he says, "Beloved, let us love one another." "One another" certainly includes our home loved ones. It is not intended that we should treat our neighbors in a kindly Christian way, and then treat our own rudely, discourteously, and in an irritating, unkindly fashion.

An English paper recently had an article on Home Manners. A young girl boarded with an elderly woman, who took a maternal interest in her. One evening, the young girl had been out rather late and a fine young man brought her home. The boarding-house woman asked the girl who the young man was. "He is my brother," replied the young woman. "Your brother!" exclaimed the somewhat cynical old lady, in a rather doubting tone. "Why, I saw him raise his hat to you as he went away." The courtesy seemed to be to the older woman impossible in a girl's own brother. Is it so? Do brothers not usually practice good manners toward their sisters? Every young man with even the smallest pre-

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tensions to gentlemanliness will take off his hat to any other young man's sister. Does he not also to his own?

Another incident in the same article is of a young man entering a reception room with his wife. He carelessly stepped on her gown and stumbled. "Mary," he said impatiently, "I wish you would either hold your dresses up, or have them made short." The wife said nothing for a moment, and then she asked very pleasantly, "Charles, if it had been some other woman whose dress you had stepped on, what would you have said?" The young man was honest with himself. He bowed and said frankly, "I should have apologized for my awkwardness, and I do now most humbly apologize to you, my dear. I am truly ashamed of myself."

The lesson of loving one another means that children should be affectionate to each other in their own home. Because you are older than your brother and sister you will not feel that it is your privilege to rule them, command them, dictate to them, to make them

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give up everything to you and serve you, to please you and mind you always. That is not the way love does. Jesus tells us that love gives up, that it does not demand to be served, to have things done for it by others, but rather delights to serve, to do things for others. One of the most beautiful sights one sees among children is that of an older child playing the maternal part with one who is younger, patiently humoring her, trying to comfort her, doing things to soothe her, carrying her when the little thing is tired, keeping sweet and loving when the child is fretful and irritable.

But it is not only among children that there is need for the cultivation of love in home relations. There are older people who would do well to heed the lesson. Some people seem to think of their home as a place where they can relax love's restraint, and work off the bad humors and tempers which they have been compelled in other places to hold in check. But on the other hand home ought to be a man's training place, a place in which

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he may learn all the sweet and beautiful ways of love. A great Hindu says, "The fittest and most practicable place for the conquest of anger, selfishness, rudeness and impatience is in a man's own home. Be a saint there and it does not matter so much what you are elsewhere."

According to St. Paul's teaching, love "suffereth long." It never gets tired doing things, making sacrifices, even enduring rudeness and injustice. Love is also "kind"—is always doing little, obliging things. Love "vaunteth not itself"—does not pose or strut as if wiser and superior, is not self-conceited, masterful, tyrannical. Love "seeketh not its own." That is the secret of it all. Too many people do seek their own and never think of the other. It is self-love that makes so many of us hard to get along with, exacting, touchy, sensitive to slights, disposed to think we are not fairly treated, and which sends us off to sulk and pout when we cannot have our own way. What difference whether we are fairly treated or not? Love does not give a

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thought to such questions. It does not think at all of itself.

*“Love thyself last. Look near, behold thy duty
To those who walk beside thee down life’s road;
Make glad their days by little acts of beauty,
And help them bear the burden of life’s load.”*

There is a story of two brothers who were crossing a lake one day, on the ice. They went on together until they came to a crack. The bigger boy leaped over easily, but the little fellow was afraid to try it. His brother sought to encourage him, but he could not put nerve enough into the boy to get him to make the attempt. Then he laid himself down across the crack in the ice, making a bridge of his own body, and the little fellow climbed over on him. That is what older boys should always be ready to do for their younger brothers—make bridges of their superior wisdom, strength, courage, experience, on which the little fellows may be helped over and on.

Older girls too have fine opportunities for

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helping younger brothers and sisters. They should be sure to show their love in all self-forgetful ways. A gentleman tells of seeing a half-grown girl carrying a large overgrown baby, almost as big as herself. She seemed to be entirely unequal to her task, and yet she was as happy as a lark. "Well, little girl, is not your load too heavy for you?" he asked. "Oh, no, sir," she cheerfully replied, "it is my brother." That made the burden light. Love made the task easy. God bless the little girl-mothers. They can be sweet influences in the home. They can do a thousand little things for their younger sisters and brothers. They can be patient and gentle with them. They can teach them many lessons. They can show them how to be sweet and brave. They can carry little burdens for them and help them along the hard bits of path. Let the older girls be guardian angels for the younger ones in the home.

One beautiful thing about loving is that it brings its own reward. We say it costs to love and so it does. We must forget self. We

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must give up our own pleasure, our own way, and think only of others. But it is in this very cost of loving that the blessing comes to us. We do not exhaust our store of loving in giving and sacrificing. The more we give the more we have. Instead of leaving us poor it makes us rich. It is like the widow's meal and oil. If she had refused to share her little with the prophet's need she would have had only enough to last her own household one day. But she gave to the prophet and the little supply lasted for herself, her son and the man of God through years.

How can we learn the lesson? It takes patience and long practice to learn any lesson. The lesson of love is very long and takes a great deal of patience and very much practice. It begins in the heart. Let Christ live in you and he will sweeten your life. One day at an auction a man bought a vase of cheap earthenware for a few cents. He put into the vase a rich perfume, the attar of roses. For a long time the vase held this perfume and when it was empty it had been so

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soaked through with the sweet perfume that the fragrance lingered. One day the vase fell and was broken to pieces, but every fragment still smelled of the attar of roses.

We are all common clay, plain earthenware, but if the love of Christ is kept in our hearts it will sweeten all our life, and we shall become loving as he is. That is the way the beloved disciple learned the lesson and grew into such lovingness. He leaned on Christ's breast and Christ's gentleness filled all his life.

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*When thou dost talk with God—by prayer, I mean—
Lift up pure hands; lay down all lusts' desires;
Fix thoughts on heaven; present a conscience clean;
Since holy blame to mercy's throne aspires,
Confess fault's guilt, crave pardon for thy sin,
Tread holy paths, call grace to guide therein.*

*Even as Elias, mounting to the sky,
Did cast his mantle to the earth behind,
So, when the heart presents the prayer on high,
Exclude the world from traffic with the mind;
Lips near to God, and raging heart within,
Is but vain babbling and converts to sin.*

—ROBERT SOUTHWELL.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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BUT how can we pray without ceasing? Are we to spend all our time on our knees? This certainly is not the meaning. We have our work to do. We are set in our places in this world to toil. A little bit of garden is given every one of us to tend and keep. Our duties fill our hands every hour. We sin when we neglect any allotted task. We can conceive of praying that would be wrong—praying, when some imperative duty is calling us out, kneeling in our closet in devotion, when some distress needs our help outside. When a sick child requires a mother's care and devotion some Sunday morning, she would not please God if she left her child and went to a church service. When a physician is needed at a sufferer's bedside, he would not please God by leaving his place to attend a communion service.

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It is told in old monastic legends of St. Francesca, that while she was unfailing in her religious duties, never wearying in her devotions, yet if in her time of prayer she was summoned away by any pressing domestic service, she would close her book cheerfully, saying that a wife and mother, when needed for any duty of love, must quit her God at the altar to find him in tasks and services requiring her in her home. So there are times when prayer is not the duty of the hour.

What then are we to understand by the counsel, to pray without ceasing? For one thing we know that prayer is part of the expression of the Christian's very life. One who does not pray is not a Christian. We are God's children, and if we always keep ourselves in the relation of children to our Father, loving, obedient, trustful, submissive to his will, we shall pray without ceasing. Our communion with him never will be broken. That was the way Jesus lived. He was not always on his knees. His days were filled with

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intense activities. Often he had not time to eat or to sleep. Yet there was never an instant of interruption of his fellowship with his Father. He was in communion with him even in his busiest hours. And he would have us live in the same way. We shall then pray at our work. Our heart will be in communion with Christ even when our hands are engaged in the day's duties. One writes,

*“The busy fingers fly; the eyes may see
Only the glancing needle which they hold;
But all my life is blossoming inwardly,
And every breath is like a litany;
While through each labor, like a thread of
gold,
Is woven the sweet consciousness of Thee.”*

To pray without ceasing is to do everything with prayer. This does not mean that every separate piece of work we undertake shall be begun with a formal act of prayer, stopping, kneeling, and offering a petition in words. This would be a physical impossibility. But we may keep our heart always in converse

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with God, never out of tune with him. We may live so near to God that we can talk with him wherever we are, ask him questions and get answers, seek his wisdom in all perplexities and his help in all experiences, and have his direction and guidance at every turn. We like to go to some human friend in whose love and wisdom we have confidence and talk over matters that are causing us anxiety, or about which we are uncertain. We sit down with our friend and consider the case and get advice, at least get light. Have you ever thought that you can do just this with Jesus Christ? You cannot see him and cannot hear his voice, but he is as really with you as was the human friend with whom you took counsel yesterday. He listens to every word you say, as you falteringly tell him of your difficulties, your perplexities, your fears, and as you ask him what you ought to do. He is interested in all the things on which you desire light and wisdom. Nothing in your life is too small for him to talk over with you on his busiest day.

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You say, "Yes, but I cannot hear what he says in answer to my questions, and how can I get advice or direction from him?" You believe that Christ is able to find some way to make you understand whatever he wants you to know. He may whisper in your heart a suggestion as to your duty, or he may speak to you in his word, which is meant to be a lamp to your feet. Or the advice may come through a human friend. He can find some way at least to make his will known to you. No joy in this world is sweeter than the joy of being trusted, of having others come to us in their needs or sorrows, that we may help them. One of the saddest things we can conceive of is not to be needed longer by any one, to have no one turn to us any more for help or love or friendship. It strengthens us to have another lean on us and need us. To have Christ need us in guiding and blessing others is the deepest, sweetest joy of earth. We need to pray without ceasing if we are to be wise helpers of others. We dare not give advice to any one in per-

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plexity without first asking Christ what to say. We might say the wrong word. It is his work, not our own that we are doing, and we must have him tell us what to do. Wrong or mistaken advice has wrecked many a destiny. Ofttimes a life's whole future depends upon the word we say at some critical point. We must first get wisdom ourselves before we can give wisdom to others.

Sometimes we wonder how the great God, with all the worlds in his hands, can give attention to a little worry of ours to-day. We are even amazed to learn that some great man with a thousand responsibilities, can think of us, be interested in us, take time to do things for us. How then can our Master, with the worlds in his thought, keep us in his heart, and be interested in the minute things of our lives?

*“Among so many, does he care?
Can special love be everywhere?”
I asked. My soul bethought of this—
In just that very place of his*

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*Where he hath put and keepeth you,
Christ has no other thing to do."*

One writes, "One day last week I was exceedingly busy. A score of things lay on my table, each one seeming to demand instant attention. It seemed that nothing else could be thought of. Just then a stranger came in and asked for an interview, stating in a sentence or two the nature of the matter on which advice and help were desired. I saw at once that the visitor was in great distress and needed instant help. God had sent the person to me. 'Have you time to give me—twenty minutes or a half hour?' was asked. My answer was 'Yes, I have nothing whatever to do now but to listen to you and to try to help you.' My answer was true. Listening to this stranger was God's will for me at that hour, a bit of God's work clearly brought to me to be done, and I literally had nothing to do but that." God's will is always the first thing any day, any moment, and the only thing we have to do at that time. Nothing

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else can be so pressing that that may be declined. It is the same with Christ himself. When you take to him any need, any question, any trouble, everything else is laid aside for the time.

*“In just that very place of his
Where he hath put and keepeth you,
Christ hath no other thing to do.”*

To pray without ceasing means also that we are always to be in the spirit of prayer. There never should be a moment any day or night when we cannot at once look into God's face without shame, without fear, without remorse, without shrinking, and ask his blessing on what we are doing. This is a searching test of life. We cannot ask a blessing on any wrong thing. If a man is dishonest in his business transactions, he cannot pray till he makes things right. St. Paul gives a similar test in his exhortation, “Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” The counsel covers all life—our words as well as our

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acts. Think what it would mean to have every word that drops from our lips winged and hallowed with prayer, always to breathe a little prayer before we speak and as we speak. This would make all our words true, kindly, loving, gentle—speech that will cheer and help those who hear. We can scarcely think of one using bitter words, angry, vindictive words, while his heart is filled with prayer.

Think of a man doing all his day's business in this spirit—breathing a little prayer as he commends his wares, as he makes a bargain, as he measures his goods, as he dictates his business letters, as he talks with men. Think of a woman busied with her household cares, literally taking everything to God for his counsel, for his approval, for his direction. These are not by any means impracticable or impossible suppositions. Indeed, that is the way a Christian always should live, doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus, praying without ceasing.

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*“Give us this day our daily bread, we pray,
And give us likewise, Lord, our daily thought,
That our poor souls may strengthen as they
ought,
And starve not on the husks of yesterday.”*

“But we have not time in this busy life,” some one says, “to pray so much.” We have time for everything else we want to do; have we not time then to look into God’s face for five minutes before we begin a new day? We do not know what the day may have for us—what temptations, what sudden surprises of danger, what sorrows; what would we do if we did not have God to guide us and help us in all this maddening maze of things? Dare we fail to ask God’s blessing on the journey we are about to take, on the piece of work we are about to begin, on the investment we are about to make, on the new friendship we are just forming, on the new home we are going to move into to-morrow? Time is never wasted that is spent in getting God’s blessing upon our life.

Then, really it does not require time. We can

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pray as we work, and work as we pray. It is only looking into God's face every little while, and saying, "Father, bless me in this piece of work that I am about to begin; sweeten this friendship that I am forming; strengthen me for this struggle upon which I am entering; guide me through this tangle in which I am enmeshed; keep me sweet and patient in this annoyance, this irritation which has come to me."

St. Francis of Assisi was said to live a life of unceasing prayer. A friend desired to get the secret of the saint's devotion and watched him to see how he prayed. All he saw, however, was this—no long hours spent in prayer, no agonies of supplication on his knees, but, again and again, as he went on with his duties, he was heard saying, with bowed head and clasped hands, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" That was the way he prayed. He did everything in the name of Christ. He and Jesus walked together continually—they were never separated. St. Francis did not need, when he felt the pressure of weakness, when the

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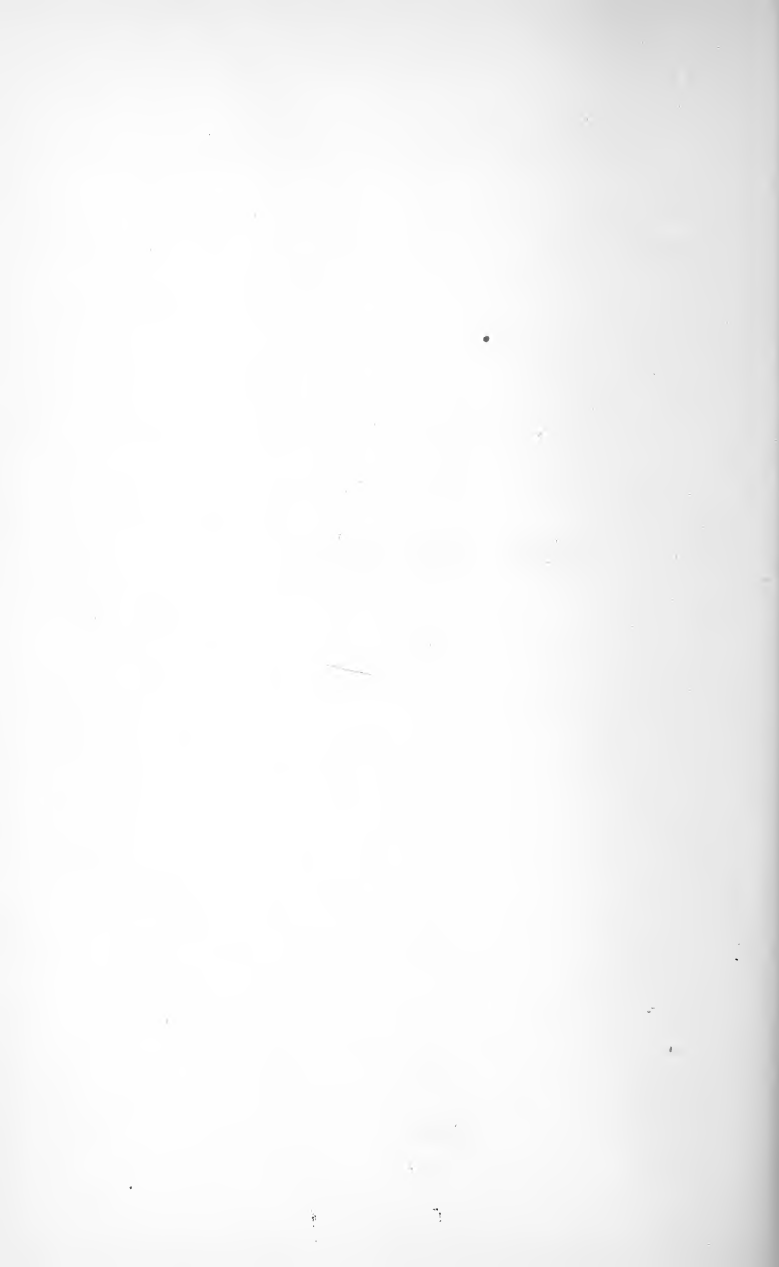
burden was growing too heavy, when he was in danger of falling—he did not need in any emergency to leave his work and hurry away to his cell to pray. He prayed just where he was; he talked to Christ about everything as familiarly as he would have done with a friend.

This is the kind of Christian life our Master would have us live. We are not to pray merely at certain hours, nor in formal acts of devotion; every breath is to be a prayer. Nor is our prayer to be only coming to God with requests, asking him to do things for us. Request is really the smallest part of true praying. What do you and your close and trusted friend do when you are together? What do you talk about? Is the burden of your conversation asking favors? May you not be with your friend for hours and never make a single request? You talk of things that are dear to you. Sometimes indeed you may not speak at all, but sit in silence, your hearts flowing together in love and fellowship. Prayer to God is not all clamor for

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favours. Much of it is love's tryst, sweet communion without words, as when John leaned his head on Jesus' breast, and loved and rested in silence.

*“Rather, as friends sit sometimes hand in hand,
Nor mar with words the sweet speech of their
eyes;
So in soft silence let us oftener bow,
Nor try with words to make God understand.”*



Roots and Roses

*"I think man's great capacity for pain
Proves his immortal birthright. I am sure
No merely human mind could bear the strain
Of some tremendous sorrows we endure.*

*"Unless our souls had root in soil divine
We could not bear earth's overwhelming strife.
The fiercest pain that racks this heart of mine,
Convinces me of everlasting life."*

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Roots and Roses



SOME people dislike creeds and doctrines. "We have no time for these," they say. "Life is too short for the discussion of these abstruse matters. Give us practical duties. Tell us how to live, how to make home sweet, how to get along with people, how to act in our social relations." But we cannot have flowers without roots, and what roots are to roses doctrines are to duties. Nearly all of St. Paul's Epistles are illustrations of this. There is a section given up to doctrinal discussion, and oftentimes this is rather serious reading too. Then follows another section in which practical duties are taught, sometimes in a very minute way.

Thus eleven chapters of the Epistle to the Romans are filled with theology. Then, beginning with the twelfth, we have a simple

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and clear setting forth of duties. Love must be without hypocrisy. We are to honor others rather than ourselves. We are to bless them that persecute us. We are not to be wise in our own conceit. We are to be good citizens. We are to pay our debts, not owing any man anything but love. A whole system of beautiful Christian ethics is packed in the last chapters of this great epistle. But these two sections are one—common duties grow out of strong doctrines.

Or take the Epistle to the Ephesians. We have three solid chapters of doctrinal teaching, in which we are led up to the mountain tops of spiritual truth. Then we come down into the valleys of every-day life and are taught the simplest lessons of practical Christian living—to put away lying and speak truth, not to let the sun go down on our wrath, not to steal any more, to let no corrupt speech come out of our mouth. Then we have, too, a scheme of Christian home ethics—duties of wives, of husbands, children, parents, servants, masters. All these

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practical exhortations spring out of the great doctrines of grace which are elaborated in the earlier chapters. These are the roses—the roots are in the theological section.

The Rev. J. H. Jowett, in a striking sermon,* calls attention to the way the sixteenth chapter of First Corinthians begins. The fifteenth chapter is given up to the subject of the resurrection. There is no sublimer passage in the Bible. Then comes in the same breath as it were, with the last sentence this most prosaic item, “Now concerning the collection.” The artificial chapter division in our Bible hides the abruptness of the transition. Yet, when we look at it closely, is there anything incongruous in the sudden passing from the great truths of resurrection and the immortal life to the duty of taking a collection? “Now hath Christ been raised from the dead. . . . Death is swallowed up in victory. . . . Be ye steadfast and unmov-

* *Apostolic Optimism*, published by Hodder and Stoughton, London.

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able, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord. Now concerning the collection." "It feels like passing from bracing mountain heights to sweltering vales," says Mr. Jowett. "Say, rather, it is like passing from the springs to the river." Great doctrines first, then common duties. Roots, then roses.

Some might say that the truth that we are immortal, that we shall never die, has no practical value, can make no difference on our life in this world. Why spend time in such speculations? But that is not the view St. Paul took of it. He said, "In Christ shall all be made alive. . . . The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. . . . Wherefore, be ye . . . always abounding in the work of the Lord." The fact that life will go on forever is the reason that we should always abound in the work of the Lord. Artists think it worth while to put their noble creations on canvas, in the hope that they may last one hundred years. But when a

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mother teaches her little child beautiful lessons or puts gentle thoughts into its mind, she is doing it not for a century or for ten centuries, but for immortality. Does not this make it worth while for her to do her work well?

This truth of immortality gives a wonderful motive to those who are doing spiritual work. Some of the people whom we seek to help are broken in their earthly lives. There are those, for example, whose bodies are dwarfed and misshapen. What does the truth of the immortal life tell us about these crippled and deformed ones? Only for a little while shall they be kept in these broken bodies. What an emancipation death will be to them!

One tells of a little wrinkled old woman who sells newspapers at a certain street corner in a great city, day after day, in sun and rain, in winter and summer. Here is the story of this poor creature's life. She was bereft of her husband, and then an orphan grandchild was put into her arms by her dying daughter, and she promised to provide for the little one.

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This is the secret that sends her to her hard task day after day. Then that is not all the story. Some old friends offered the woman a home with them in return for trifling services, but she would have had to be faithless to her trust. This she could not be. Her dead daughter's child was sacred to her. So she stands there on the street corner in all weathers, selling newspapers to provide for the little child. Ah, it is a noble soul that is in that old bent, wrinkled body! No angel in heaven is dearer to God than that poor creature, serving so faithfully at her post. Think what immortality means to her!

A little child was left in the arms of a young father by a dying mother. He was thankful. "Her beautiful mother will live again in her, and I shall be comforted," he said. He lavished his love upon her. But the child developed spinal disease and grew to be sadly misshapen. The father's disappointment was pitiful. He drew himself away from the ill-favored child, neglecting her. At length the child died and as the father sat in his room

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in the evening, thinking of her sad, short life, he fell asleep and a radiant vision appeared before him. It was his daughter, straight and beautiful, more beautiful than her lovely mother ever had been. He held out his arms yearningly, and she drew near to him, and knelt, and laid her head against his breast. They talked long of things in their inmost souls, and he understood that this was his daughter in reality. This was the child as she was in her inner life, the spirit-child, what she was as God and angels saw her. He never had been able to see her in this radiant loveliness, however, because of the physical deformity which disease had wrought, thus hiding from his blinded eyes the real splendor of her sweet, lovely girlhood. With great tenderness he laid his hand on her head, saying, "My daughter!" Then the vision vanished—it was only a dream. But in the dream there was a revealing of the truth about her. This was indeed the child over whose disfigurement he was so bitterly disappointed. This was the being that had dwelt in that crooked

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body. This was what she was now in her immortal body.

So we begin to see that St. Paul spoke truly when he said that since we are immortal, and because we are immortal, we should abound in the work of the Lord—"forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord." Those who touch children's lives these days with divine benedictions are putting upon them marks of beauty which never shall fade out. Be not impatient of results. The seed you sowed yesterday may not come to ripe harvest to-day or to-morrow, but God's years are long.

*"The good we hoped to gain has failed us—well,
We do not see the ending—and the boon
May wait us down the ages—who can tell?—
Or bless us amply soon.*

*"In God's eternal plan, a month, a year,
Is but an hour of some slow April day
Holding the germs of what we hope or fear,
To blossom far away."*

When we think of it closely we see that the collection to which St. Paul refers was not

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something incongruous, after the great resurrection lesson, but came most fittingly after what he had been saying. It was a collection for the poor Christians at Jerusalem. One of the first impulses of Christianity is to care for those who are poor and in need. There was something very beautiful, therefore, in this "collection." It was to be taken by Gentile Christians to be sent to Palestine for the relief of poor Jewish Christians. The feeling between Gentiles and Jews was not naturally friendly, but love of Christ brought the two races together.

The fifteenth chapter, therefore, belongs logically before the sixteenth. They could not have had this collection before they had the wonderful teachings about the death and resurrection of Christ. There must be a spring with its exhaustless fountains away back in the hills before there can be streams of water to pour out with their refreshment. There would never have been a collection among the Gentiles in Corinth and Ephesus for poor Jews in Palestine, if Christ had not died

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and risen again. Nothing but the gospel can make men of different races love each other. But as we read the great words, "Now hath Christ been raised." . . . "O death where is thy sting?" . . . "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," it is natural and fitting, no descending from lofty peak to lowly valley, no coming down from the glorious to the commonplace, to read, "Now for the collection." It is only part of the great outflow of love.

If, after a sacred communion service, in which we have all been lifted up in blessed love for Christ, the minister should tell us of a family of Christians somewhere who were suffering and in sore distress, hungry and famishing, and ask us for a collection for their relief, we would not think he had broken in upon the sacredness of the holy service, and there would be nothing inappropriate or incongruous in his saying, after the bread and the wine had been received, "Now we will take the collection for these poor fellow Christians of ours." The collection would be almost as

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much of a sacrament as the taking of the bread and the wine. Religion always kindles love. Every time we really look anew upon Christ as our suffering Redeemer, we love others more and our sympathies come out in greater tenderness.

Show Me the Path

*“If we could see beyond to-day
As God can see;
If all the clouds should roll away,
The shadows flee—
O'er present griefs we would not fret,
Each sorrow we would soon forget,
For many joys are waiting yet
For you and me.*

*“If we could know beyond to-day
As God doth know,
Why dearest treasures pass away
And tears must flow—
And why the darkness leads to light,
Why dreary paths will soon grow bright!
Some day life's wrongs will be made right
Faith tells us so.*

*“If we could see, if we could know,
We often say!
But God in love a veil doth throw
Across our way:
We cannot see what lies before,
And so we cling to him the more.
He leads us till this life is o'er.
Trust and obey.”*

CHAPTER TWENTY

Show Me the Path



THE little prayer is singular—"Thou wilt show me the path." Does the great and glorious God actually give thought to individual human lives? We can conceive that he might direct the career of certain great men, whose lives are of importance in the world; but will he show common people the way? Will he guide a poor man or a little child? The Bible teaches that he will. He feeds the sparrows. He clothes the lilies. He calls the stars by their names. Then the Bible is full of expressions of God's interest in individuals. Jesus taught this truth when he said that the Good Shepherd calleth his own sheep by name. The Shepherd Psalm has it, too—"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He leadeth me."

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Let no one think that he is only one of a crowd in God's thought. Each believer has his own place, and is cared for just as if he were the only one. God loves us as individuals—he could not really love us in any other way. He knows always where we are and what our circumstances are. God's will refers to the smallest matters and takes in the smallest events in each life. A Spanish proverb says, "A leaf stirs not on the tree without the will of God." God's hand is in every event. We talk of the laws of nature and say that nothing ever gets out of their grasp. But what is nature? It is not something independent of God. The laws of nature are simply God's laws. Nothing takes place that is contrary to the divine will. Nothing—no storm, no earthquake, no cyclone, no tidal wave, ever gets out of God's control. Natural law rules in everything and natural law is simply the power of God manifesting itself. This world is not controlled by chance, nor by any blind fate, but by him who loved us so much that he gave his Son to die for

Show me the path

us. We need not hesitate, therefore, to accept the truth that God will show each one of us the path.

How can we have this guidance? If we would have it, the first thing for us is to realize our need of it. Some people do not. They think they can find the way themselves. They never pray, "Show me the path." During the past summer a letter from Switzerland told of two men who undertook the ascent of one of the mountains near Geneva, without guides or ropes or any of the ordinary appliances for safety. Their conduct attracted attention, being so foolhardy, and their progress was watched through strong glasses by many at the hotel. Soon the men were seen to be in trouble, wandering aimlessly over the ice. In a little while one of them disappeared, and not long afterward the other also was lost to view. A searching party went out, and it was discovered that the first man had fallen into a crevasse, hundreds of feet deep, where his dead body was found. The other had fallen, but, more fortunate than his companion, he

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fell into the snow and was able to crawl out and make his way to a hospice, where he was found in an unconscious state.

It is foolhardy to try to climb the Alps without a guide. It is far more perilous to try to go through this world without a guide. It is one of the most assuring promises of the Bible that God himself will be our guide, not only in our mountain-climbs and through the dark valleys, but in every part of our way. But we must be willing to be led. God will not drive us, nor compel us—he will lead us. And we may take another path if we will. Many people do. If we would be shown the way, we must be conscious of our need of guidance and must walk obediently in the path that the Guide marks out for our feet.

If we would have God show us the path, we must also trust his guidance. Sometimes we grow impatient of God's leading because he seems to take us only along homely ways, giving us only commonplace things to do. We think we could do something larger, could

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make more of our life, if we could get into a wider sphere and have greater opportunities. Some people even chafe and fret, spoiling the lowly work that is given them to do, in their discontent with it and their desire for some larger place and some more conspicuous work. If therefore we ask God to show us the path, we must accept his leading as it becomes clear to us.

The path may not always be smooth. It is the path of life, but the way of life oftentimes leads through painful experiences. The baby begins to live in a cry, and in some form or other we suffer unto the end. Sometimes there is inscrutable mystery in a particular trial through which we are led. About four and a half years ago a happy young couple came from the marriage altar and set up their home. They were full of hope and joy. A year later a baby came. It was welcomed with great gladness. The young parents gave it to God. From the beginning, however, the baby was a sufferer. All its short years it has been sick. The parents have done all that

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self-sacrificing love could do, all that money could do, in the hope that the little one would recover. The best physicians have been interested and have exhausted their skill in vain efforts to cure the child. But now, at three and a half years, when other children are so bright, so beautiful, such centers of gladness in their homes, this little one is a baby still in her helplessness, not seeing the faces that bend over her in passionate love, not responding to the caresses and tendernesses which are lavished upon her.

Recently the child was taken to a distinguished physician. After careful examination his decision was that the case is absolutely hopeless. We can understand how, with what crushing weight, the doctor's word fell upon this mother's ears, and how they darkened her life. Until that moment she had still hoped that her child might some time be cured. Now she understands that how long soever the little one may stay with her, she will never be any better.

“What shall I do?” was the mother's ques-

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tion, when talking with a friend, in telling of the visit to the great doctor. "What can I do? What ought I to do?"

There is something inscrutable in this providence. What comfort can any one give to such parents? Yet there is comfort; there must be comfort, since God is their Father. For one thing, their child is just as dear to God as if she were well and strong and bright. Indeed, she is dearer. God is just like a mother in his exceeding tenderness and yearning for one who is suffering. This child is dear to God and has his gentlest sympathy and care. The child's angel has access to God continually.

Then some day she will be well. Heaven is the place where earth's arrested growths will reach perfection, where earth's blighted things will develop into full beauty. The child will not be sick, nor blind, nor imperfect, there. The hopelessness of her condition is only for the present life. Sometime, somewhere, the mother's dreams of beauty, not realized here, in her child's stunted life, will

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all be fulfilled, and her prayers for her child's healing will all be answered. There is comfort in this.

But, meanwhile? Yes, it is hard to look upon the little one's condition, so pathetic, so pitiful, and to remember the great doctor's words, "Absolutely hopeless. She will never be any better." Is there any comfort? Can this mother say that in this experience God is showing her the path? Yes. Is this suffering part of that path? Yes, it is. Does God know about this child's long struggle? He knows the whole story. Has he heard the countless prayers that have gone up from this home for the baby's recovery? He has heard every prayer. Does he know what the doctor said the other day? Yes, he knows all. Has he then no power to do anything? Yes, he has all power. Why, then, has he not cured the child? He has his reasons. Why does he allow the agony to continue in the heart of the mother?

We dare not try to answer our own questions. We do not know God's reason. Yet one

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thing we know—it is all right. God is love. He is never unkind. He makes no mistakes. What good can possibly come from this child's pitiable condition and from its continuation, year after year in this condition? We do not know—but God knows. Perhaps it is that the child may be prepared for a glory which shall far surpass in splendor that of any child that is well and joyous now. Or perhaps it is for the sake of the father and the mother who are being led through these years of anguish, disappointment and bitter sorrow, and will be transfigured by the experience. We know at least that these parents are receiving a wonderful training in unselfishness, in gentleness, in patience, in trust. Perhaps all this sore experience in their child is to make their hearts more gentle, to teach them trust and songs of joy.

The disciples asked the Master whose sin it was—the sin of the blind man or of his parents, that he was blind. Jesus replied, "Neither—no one's sin, but that the works of God might be done in the man." He meant

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that this blindness gave him the opportunity of doing a work of mercy. May it be that this child's condition finds its reason in the ministry of love which is called out in the mother and the father? It has been a wonderful training and education for them. They have been prepared by it for a blessed service to other suffering ones. Perhaps in heaven they will learn that they owe to their child's long and painful suffering much of what they shall then wear of the beauty of Christ.

In one of the famous lace shops of Brussels, there are certain rooms devoted to the spinning of the finest and most delicate lace patterns. These rooms are altogether darkened, save for the light from one very small window, which falls directly upon the pattern. There is only one spinner in the room, and he sits where the narrow stream of light falls upon the threads of his weaving. "Thus," we are told by the guide, "do we secure our choicest products. Lace is always more delicately and beautifully woven when

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the worker himself is in the dark and only his pattern is in the light.”

May it not be the same with us in our weaving? Sometimes it is very dark. We cannot understand what we are doing. We do not see the web we are weaving. We are not able to discover any beauty, any possible good in our experience. Yet if only we are faithful and fail not and faint not, we shall some day know that the most exquisite work of our life was done in those very days when it was so dark. If you are in the deep shadows because of some strange, mysterious providence, do not be afraid. Simply go on in faith and love, never doubting, not even asking why, bearing your pain in silence, and learning to sing while you suffer. God is watching and he will bring good and beauty out of all your pain and tears. Just as truly in such experiences as this, as in the brightest and most joyous, can we say, “Thou art showing me the path.” This very path which seems to you so dark, so hard for your feet, is the path God is choosing.

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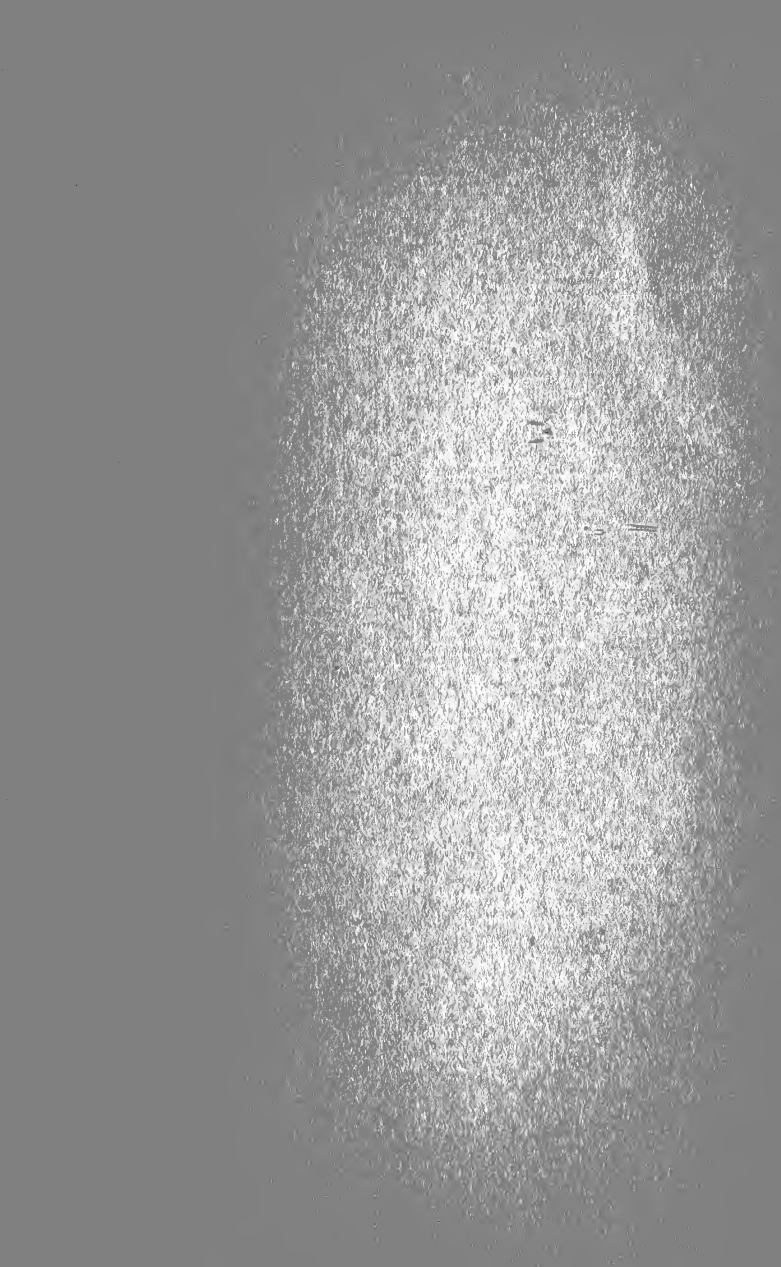
Then God's path is always the right path. "He led them forth by the right way." God never leads any one in the wrong way. The path is steep, but it runs up the mountain of God. It may be rough, but the end will be so blessed, so glorious, that in its joy we will forget the briars and thorns on the way.

*"O pilgrim, as you journey, do you ever gladly
say,
In spite of heavy burdens and the roughness of
the way,
That it surely does not matter—all the strange
and bitter stress;
Heat and cold, and toil and sorrow—'twill be
healed with blessedness—
For the road leads home?"*

*"Home! the safe and blissful shelter where is
glad and full content,
And companionship of kindred; and the treasures
early rent
From your holding shall be given back, more
precious than before.
Oh! you will not mind the journey with such
blessedness in store,
When the road leads home.*

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*“Oh, you will not mind the roughness, nor the
steepness of the way,
Nor the chill, unrested morning, nor the drear-
ness of the day;
And you will not take a turning to the left or
to the right,
But go straight ahead, nor tremble at the coming
of the night,
For the road leads home.”*



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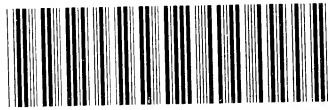
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